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November 2015 | Issue 206

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France near and far

There must be many places in France that could stake a claim to being the 'most beautiful kilometre' in the country, but for this month's cover story Paul Bloomfield walked a stretch of Normandy's coastline that was allegedly declared as such by a French Prime Minister, Édouard Herriot, and General Eisenhower. The walk culminates with the sight of Mont-Saint-Michel, one of France's most iconic locations, and his story makes you want to jump on a ferry and see it for yourself.

Normandy is an ideal destination for those travelling with a pet. It's just a short hop off the ferry, and you have wonderful beaches, forests and villages to explore. For our 'Where to stay' feature this month, we've put those lucky pooches first, and found a selection of hotels and other accommodation that positively welcome our furry friends.

This year has been an exciting one in the story of the *Hermione*, the replica frigate which is now based in Rochefort in Charente-Maritime, after a summer of sailing up the east coast of the United States. Peter Stewart climbed aboard and heard more about its exciting adventures.

With winter on the horizon, you may want to look to sunnier climes to indulge your love of France. Ray Kershaw went halfway around the world on the trip of a lifetime to New Caledonia in the South Pacific, where he discovered a fascinating blend of cultures.

To help you to plan future trips, our beautiful *FRANCE Calendar* is now available. Simply turn to page 34 for details. If you have friends or family with an interest in France, then do take advantage of our special Christmas gift offer. À bientôt!



Carolyn
Carolyn Boyd
Editor

CONTRIBUTORS

Patricia Stoughton

Freelance journalist Patricia, who lives and works in London and Brittany, specialises in writing about French life, history and culture. On page 19, she visits a striking new war memorial honouring those who died on the Western Front.



Paul Shearer

Paul is an actor and writer best-known for his TV comedy roles, especially on BBC's *The Fast Show*. He is also a Francophile and makes regular visits across the Channel. On page 70, he explores the wine-making village of Saint-Émilion.



Amanda Hodgkinson

Novelist Amanda has lived in Gascony in south-west France for more than ten years, and has recently published her second novel, *Spilt Milk*, a sequel to her best-seller *22 Britannia Road*. On page 33, she writes about buying chickens in a local market.



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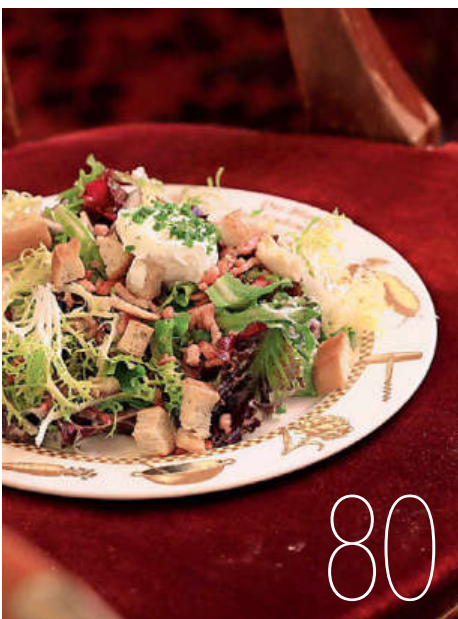
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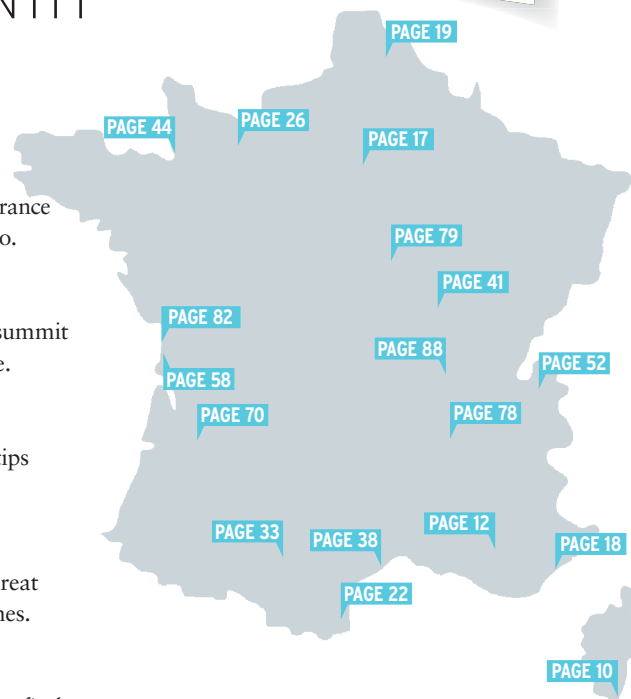
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COVER IMAGE: THE ABBEY OF
LE MONT-SAINT-MICHEL, NORMANDY
BY STÉPHANE LEMAIRE/HEMIS.FR



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ABOUT US

FRANCE Magazine is Britain and North America's best-selling magazine about France. Since 1990, it has enchanted readers with its stunning photography and excellent travel writing. Alongside its inspirational and informative travel articles, FRANCE Magazine offers features on food and wine, language and history, culture and current affairs; together, it gives readers the perfect taste of the very best of France. It truly is the next best thing to being there.

QUI SOMMES-NOUS ?

FRANCE Magazine est une publication de première qualité, rédigée en anglais et consacrée exclusivement à la France. Depuis 1990, cette publication mensuelle à la réputation incontestée, domine le marché francophile en Grande-Bretagne et aux États-Unis. A travers des articles de voyage, des rubriques gastronomiques et linguistiques, FRANCE Magazine invite ses lecteurs à découvrir tous les meilleurs aspects de l'Hexagone et de ses produits.

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OUR AWARDS

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■ Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Runner-up for Young Writer of the Year at the Aito (Association of Independent Travel Operators) Awards **Zoë McIntyre**

2013

■ Winner of Young Travel Writer of the Year at the British Travel Press Awards **Zoë McIntyre**
■ Winner of Best Travel Article at the Outdoor Writers' & Photographers' Guild **Judy Armstrong**

■ Winner of Gastronomy Article of the Year at the Atout France French Tourist Board Travel Publication Awards **Eve Middleton**
■ Winner of Travel Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Winner of Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Publication Awards **Ray Kershaw**

2012

■ Winner of Best European Destination Travel Feature at the British Guild of Travel Writers Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Runner-up for Young Writer of the Year at the Aito Awards **Eve Middleton**

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FRANCE *at a glance*



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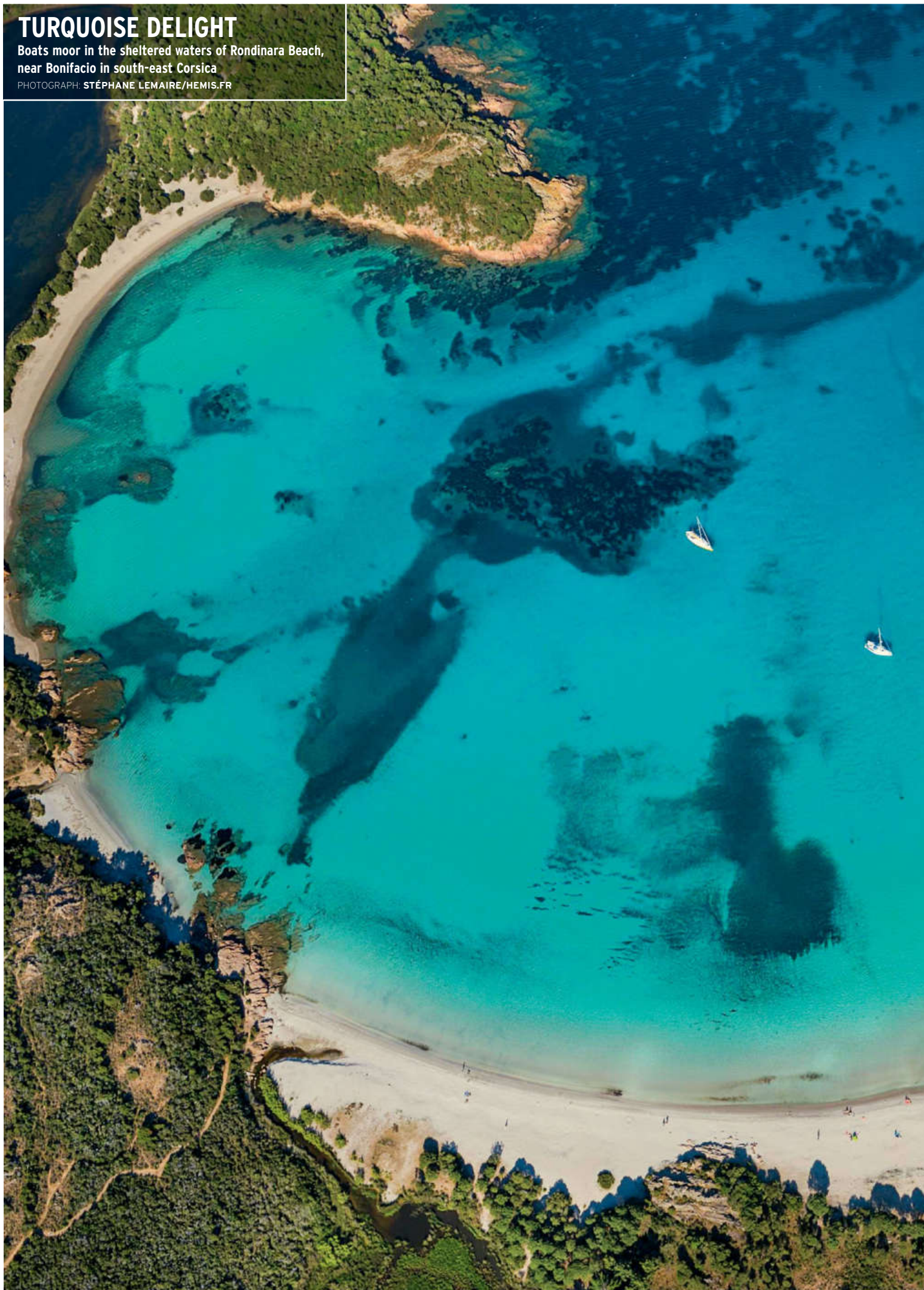
Mont Pourri (3,779m) in the Vanoise National Park looks down on the Haute-Tarentaise Valley of Savoie, near the hamlet of Le Monal

PHOTOGRAPH: PIERRE JACQUES/HEMIS.FR

TURQUOISE DELIGHT

Boats moor in the sheltered waters of Rondinara Beach, near Bonifacio in south-east Corsica

PHOTOGRAPH: STÉPHANE LEMAIRE/HEMIS.FR





ACTOR TAKES CENTRE STAGE

Charles-Arthur Bourgeois's bronze statue of a Greek actor looks over the Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris, with the Panthéon in the background

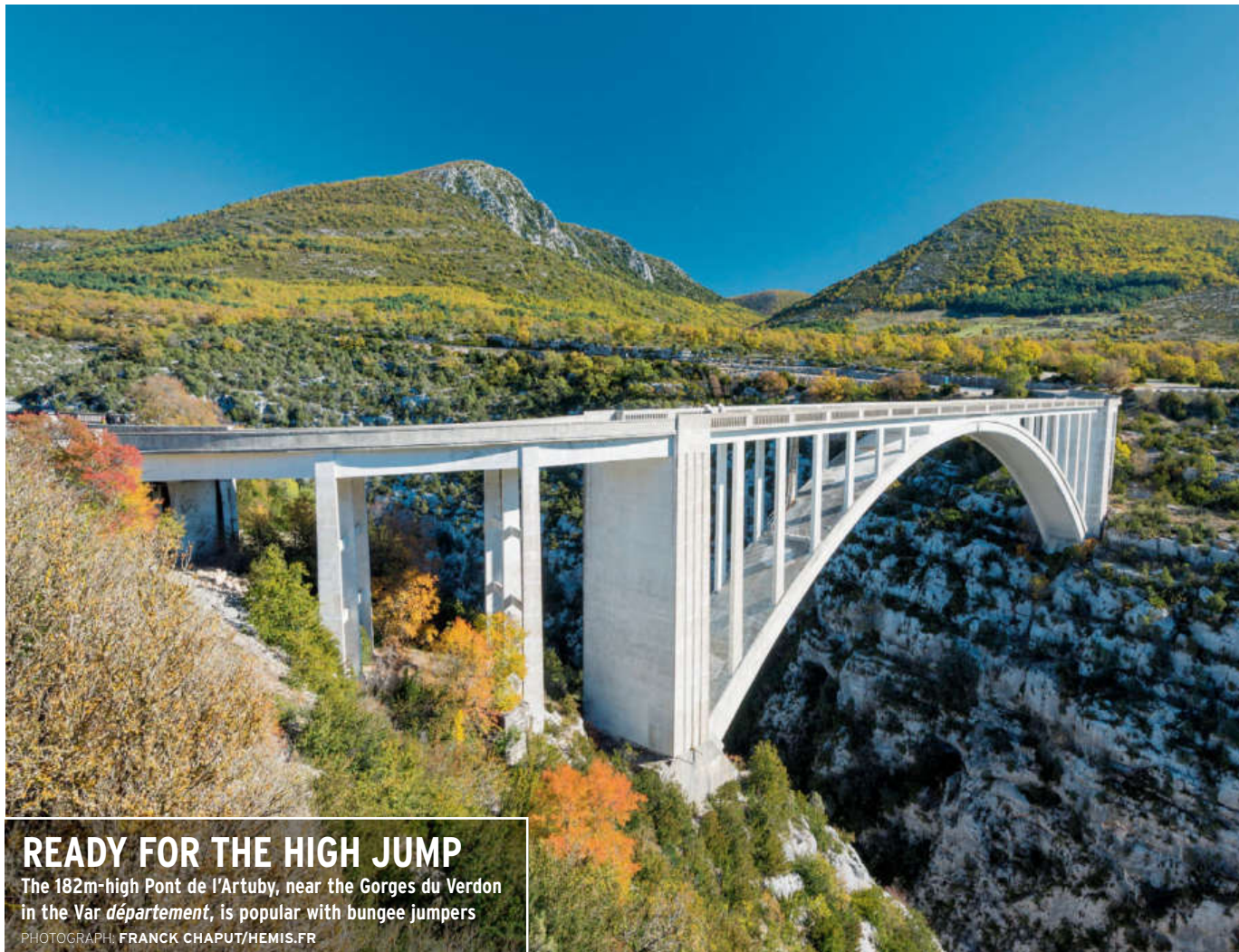
PHOTOGRAPH: YANN DOELAN/HEMIS.FR

BIG CHEESE IN THE AUVERGNE

Artisan cheesemaker Alexis Meironen shows off his work at his farm in the village of Murat in the Volcans d'Auvergne Regional Natural Park

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN FRUMM/HEMIS.FR





READY FOR THE HIGH JUMP

The 182m-high Pont de l'Artuby, near the Gorges du Verdon in the Var *département*, is popular with bungee jumpers

PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCK CHAPUT/HEMIS.FR

DINERS IN THE PINK

Customers relax outside the Maison Rose bistro in the Montmartre district of Paris. This image appears in the *FRANCE Calendar 2016*, which can be ordered on page 34

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How to be a Parisian

Paris-based **Stephen Clarke** gives his humorous take on life in the capital



I was stuck in a Parisian traffic jam, in a taxi. Normally this would irritate me – it's absurd to pay someone to take you nowhere. If I want to go nowhere, I can do that myself. But I wasn't paying for the taxi, so I didn't feel quite so bad about sitting in a stationary car.

On the other hand, I knew that the people who were footing the bill for the taxi, a TV news channel, would be irritated about paying for someone not to appear on their programme. Millions of French people don't come on their programme without being paid for not doing so, if you get what I mean.

So I considered suggesting to the taxi driver that he might like to change into a faster-moving lane. This, I know, is a risky strategy. No cabbie likes to be told how to drive, and Parisian taxi drivers are notoriously touchy.

Before I could speak, though, he asked me what time I had to be at the TV station, and said we were OK – this jam was caused by roadworks. As soon as we cleared them, we would be cruising.

We started talking about his job, and I asked him if he was being affected by the new online 'taxi' services. Immediately, it was as if a traffic jam had cleared in his head, and the words began to pour out.

He complained about unfair competition – Parisian taxi drivers have to take exams and pay about €200,000 for a licence, whereas anyone can become one of these online drivers instantly, and for free. He also admitted that one reason for the success of the online service is that Parisian taxi drivers have a reputation for being unfriendly. This is true. Every



Stephen Clarke's latest book is *How the French Won Waterloo (Or Think They Did)*, a light-hearted examination of France's enduring fascination with Napoléon.

Parisian has stories about drivers refusing to take you where you want to go – and I don't mean Siberia, just a part of Paris where they think they might not get a fare.

Things have changed, he said. The younger drivers are much friendlier (I agree), and having a registered driver with a badge means clients are much safer. But his speech was an obvious symptom of the way the world is changing.


France is doing its best to protect the old ways – for example, bookshops, cinemas, theatres and food industries are all protected by the state. This is why cinema tickets in Paris are half the price of those in London, and why the streets are paved with goat's cheese (well, almost). French life has to stay French.

But some changes, like booking online apartments instead of hotels and online cars instead of taxis, seem to be charging through.

I thought that maybe, instead of competing with these private cars, the taxis should go the other way and offer an old-school 'taxi experience' – the driver smokes, yells at old ladies crossing the street and takes the long, expensive scenic route. Hotels could do the same thing – mini-dictators at reception, ladies of dubious morals in the lobby, shared hole-in-the-floor toilets.

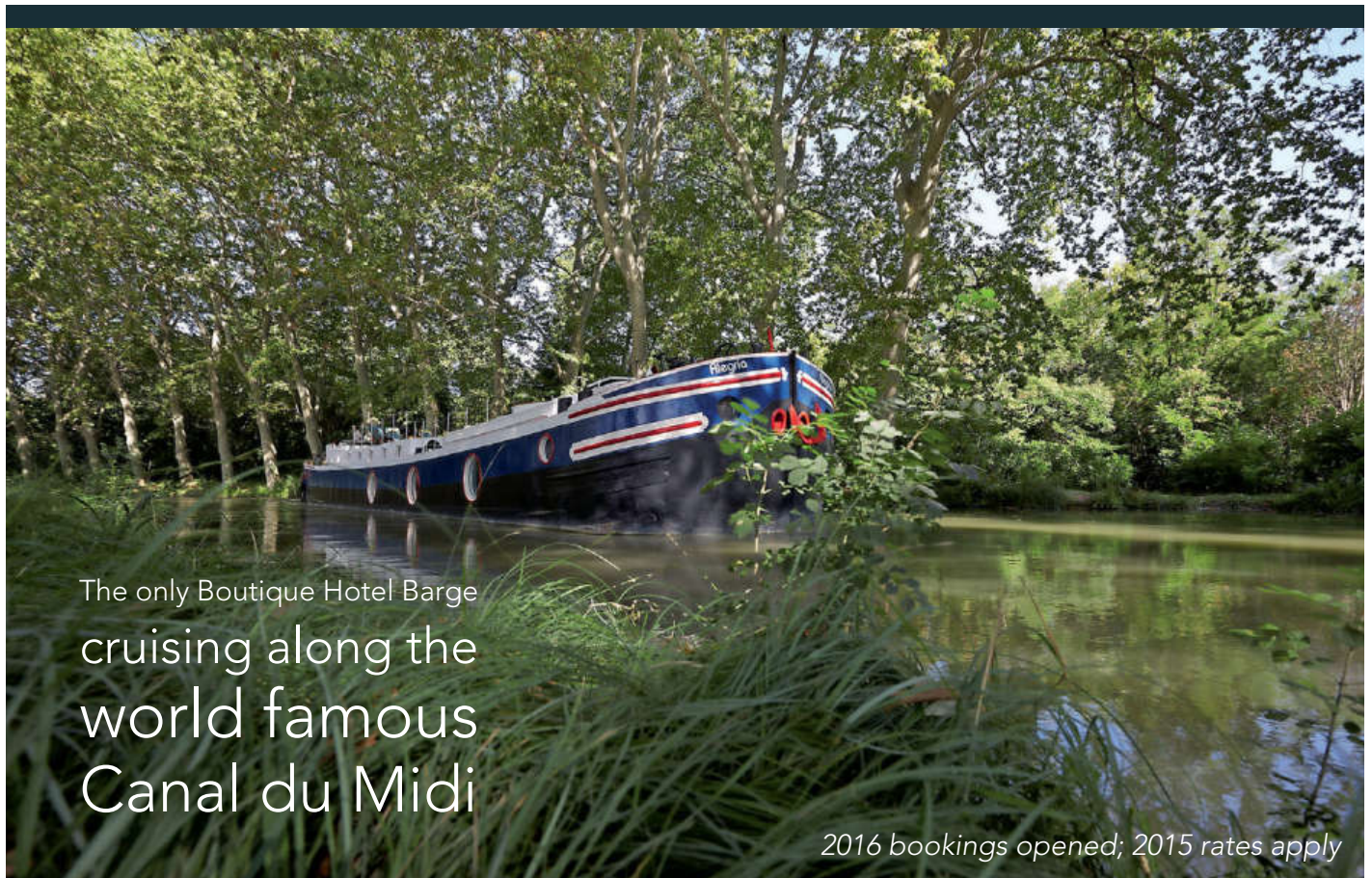
No, not a good idea, I decided, best not to mention it. Anyway, by now we had cleared the traffic jam and were almost at our destination.

Except that the driver took a wrong turning and began heading away from the TV station. I was now perilously close to being late. When I mentioned this, he apologised and said his satnav had steered him off course. I thought, 'satnav'? Aren't licensed taxi drivers meant to know the city? "These things are useless," he said. "It should have warned me about the roadworks, too. You can't trust the internet."

It was reassuring. A Frenchman was blaming someone else for a problem that he had caused. French life wasn't changing so quickly after all. 

No cabbie likes to be told how to drive, and Parisian taxi drivers are notoriously touchy

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RODIN'S RETURN

The Paris museum dedicated to Auguste Rodin, the father of modern sculpture, is re-opening this month after a €16 million refurbishment.

The Musée Rodin is housed in the Hôtel Biron, an 18th-century palace standing in three hectares of parkland near Les Invalides. The renovations are the first to be carried out on the building since Rodin used it as a studio from 1908 until his death in 1917. The museum opened two years later,

displaying many of his famous pieces, including *The Kiss*.

The three-year project has involved updating the fabric of the building and redesigning the exhibition space so it provides both a chronology of Rodin's life and a thematic exploration of his work, with a number of his pieces in plaster being displayed for the first time.

A room named 'Rodin at the Hôtel Biron' features the artist's furniture, sculptures and items from his collection of antiquities, so visitors can imagine

how he lived. The parquet floors have been refurbished and the wood-panelled rooms spruced up with paint from British company Farrow & Ball.

Disabled visitors have easier access, thanks to a new lift, toilets and widened paths in the courtyard, which will enable even more people to enjoy the works of one of France's most accomplished artists.

The Musée Rodin opens on 12 November, the 175th anniversary of the artist's birth. For more information visit www.musee-rodin.fr ➞



What to do in... November



IN THE PICTURE

Photography enthusiasts will not want to miss the annual Paris Photo Fair at the glass-domed Grand Palais (*pictured*), just off the Champs-Élysées. The event, being held from 12-15 November, is the world's largest art fair dedicated to photography, and showcases public and private collections ranging from the 19th century to the present day. International galleries and art book dealers are among more than 160 exhibitors who have already signed up. Tel: (Fr) 1 47 56 64 69 www.parisphoto.com

RED FOR GO

Make a beeline for Burgundy in time for the release of the fruity red Beaujolais Nouveau – which goes on

sale on 19 November, the third Thursday of the month. In the town of Beaujeu (*pictured above*), five days of festivities begin on the Wednesday night with a dinner, torchlight parade and *son et lumière* show before the ceremonial opening of the new vintage at a minute after midnight. Celebrations continue with a cabaret evening, markets and themed dinners Tel: (Fr) 4 74 69 26 98 www.sarmentelles.com See page 88 for *Dominic Rippon's views on Beaujolais Nouveau*.

DANCE TIME

Although best known for its film festival, the glitzy Riviera resort of Cannes also

stages a biennial celebration of dance, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this month. Held at the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès (*pictured below*) from 20-29 November, the *Festival de Danse* features emerging talents and established stars, and also runs dance masterclasses led by artists and choreographers. Tel: (Fr) 4 92 98 62 77 www.festivaldedanse-cannes.com

CINEMA SHORTS

Head to the Cinéma des Cinéastes in Montmartre for the start of the international Courts Devant short film festival, which is being held from 23-29 November in and around Place de Clichy. Categories range from thrillers and music to advertising. There are also masterclasses where film-makers meet the audience. www.courtsdevant.com



BOOK NOW, GO LATER...

CAMARGUE BY BIKE

Cycling enthusiasts will discover an unspoilt area of France on a tour organised by 'slow holiday' specialist Inntravel. The self-guided itinerary, available from 26 March to 1 July 2016, will take you through the olive groves of Provence and the wetlands of the Camargue, famous for its flamingos and white horses. Towns en route include Arles, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence and Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Prices start from £845pp based on two sharing, including six nights' B&B, three dinners, cycle hire and luggage transfers. Tel: 01653 617 000 www.inntravel.co.uk



GASCONY LIVING

Large families looking for a self-catering stay in south-west France next year will find plenty of room at Maison Fourcès, managed by The Gascony Secret. The property, near the *Plus Beau Village* of Fourcès in the Gers département, has been transformed from two cottages into one large holiday home with space for up to 12 guests. Facilities include a private swimming pool, an orchard and a large garden with views of the countryside. Prices start from £1,500 per week. Tel: (Fr) 5 53 54 54 31 www.gascony-secret.com

The camera phone was invented in 1997 by French entrepreneur Philippe Khan.

Ring of remembrance

A new memorial in Nord-Pas-de-Calais is a moving symbol of the losses incurred on the Western Front

Remembrance sites in Nord-Pas-de-Calais now include an impressive and moving tribute to the 580,000 soldiers who died on this part of the Western Front during World War I.

L'Anneau de la Mémoire (The Ring of Remembrance) is located next to France's National Cemetery of Notre-Dame de Lorette, south-west of Lens-Liévin.

The names of the Fallen – friend and foe from more than 40 countries – are inscribed in white letters on 500 gold-coloured steel panels (*pictured inset*),

which are laid out in an oval more than 300 metres in circumference. The names are in alphabetical order, in all simplicity, without note of religion, rank or nationality. Equal in death.

The Parisian architect Philippe Prost, who designed the memorial, said his aim was to “combine art and history to give a form to man’s common identity and brotherhood to serve as their lasting memory.”

For historian Yves Le Maner, who was closely involved with the project, this extraordinary monument expresses “the epitome of mass death, but also of so many individuals who existed and whose talent and intelligence were lost to humanity.”

Looking around inside the ring, the sheer number of names is overwhelming. There are whole panels of

soldiers with the same surname such as Johnson or Smith. Famous names include the English war poet Wilfred Owen, whose verses brought home the horror and pain of war, and the Canadian John McCrae, whose poem *In Flanders Fields* became the symbol of remembrance with its images of the poppies growing there.

The Ring of Remembrance was inaugurated by President François Hollande on 11 November last year. In June came a further addition to the area’s World War I memorials: Lens’14-18 – Centre d’Histoire Guerre et Paix in Souchez. This impressive, modern museum presents the events in the Artois region and French Flanders during World War I in chronological order. There are archive films, maps and a display of around 400 photographs, but the most interesting section is where visitors can consult the records of the soldiers commemorated on the Ring of Remembrance.

Patricia Stoughton

Tel: (Fr) 3 21 67 66 66

www.tourism-lenslievin.co.uk ➞



A Francophile's guide to... Canterbury

Find a French connection on your doorstep

Spiritual home of the Church of England, the city of Canterbury, like its French twin Reims, has a beautiful medieval cathedral that stands proudly over a historic centre.

Canterbury is a short hop from France and has several Gallic connections to charm residents and visitors.

To brush up on your French head for the Adult Education Centre in Knight Avenue (tel: 03000 412 222, www.kentadulteducation.co.uk). The centre organises a range of language courses and encourages learners to turn up and chat with

a native speaker or attend the free taster sessions.

For a mid-morning break take a seat at Café Saint Pierre in St Peter's Street in the city centre (tel: 01227 456 791). Enjoy a *café au lait* and home-made *pâtisserie*, and soak up this authentic slice of France before continuing your visit.

Visit the cathedral and learn how it was rebuilt in 1070 by the Norman bishop Lanfranc after a devastating fire. Explore the old centre, with its narrow cobblestone streets, timber-framed buildings and weavers' houses, once home to French Huguenots who introduced silk weaving to the city in the 17th century. Their legacy can also be seen at the cathedral, which holds a service in French on Sunday afternoons.



ABOVE: The medieval cathedral is at the heart of Canterbury; **RIGHT:** The terrace of the Café du Soleil



Stop for lunch at The Goods Shed (tel: 01227 459 153, www.thegoodshed.co.uk, mains from £16.50), a foodie haven in Station Road West. The restaurant's lunchtime bites include braised scallop and duck confit. While away part of the afternoon in the food hall which is stocked with French treats.

Enjoy an early dinner at Café du Soleil in Pound Lane (tel: 01227 479 999, www.cafedusoleil.co.uk,

mains from £10.95), where the food is inspired by the flavours of Provence. Opt for dishes such as *bouillabaisse*, aubergine gratin or crab and prawn ravioli.

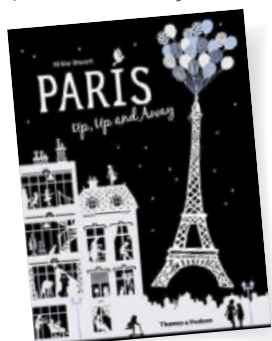
After your meal, visit the Curzon independent picture house in Westgate Hall Road (www.curzoncinemas.co.uk), which regularly screens French-language films.

Peter Stewart

For more on the city go to www.canterbury.co.uk

Read all about it...

Encourage a young child to fall for the charms of the City of Light with *Paris, Up, Up and Away* by Hélène Druvert (Thames and Hudson, £14.95). This beautifully crafted book features lasercut drawings that help to tell the story of the Eiffel Tower as it sets itself loose from the ground and embarks on a flight over the capital's beautiful sights.



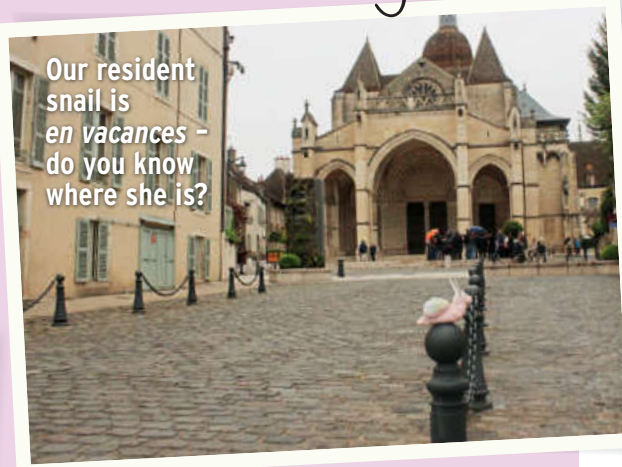
Les aventures de Sergette

Our intrepid new gastropod Sergette is out and about in France. Her adventures this month take her to a famous wine region...

WIN! LUXURY HANDMADE CHOCOLATES



Our resident snail is *en vacances* – do you know where she is?



If you know the town that Sergette is visiting (its wine auction has a worldwide reputation) send the answer, plus your name and address, to editorial@francemag.com or write us a postcard (address on page 6) and you could win a 15-piece assortment of luxury handmade chocolates that come in an elegant mahogany box (worth a total of £87) courtesy of French *chocolatier* ZChocolat (www.zchocolat.com). Deadline for entries is 4 November, 2015.

The winner of the September competition is Kate Alcroft, from East Grinstead in West Sussex, who correctly identified the MuséoParc Alésia in Alise-Sainte-Reine in the Côte-d'Or *département*.



BARGE CRUISES IN SOUTHERN FRANCE ON THE CANAL DU MIDI

Caroline offers a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere and a variant of the dream: 'Living like God in France'. Caroline is run very personally by the owner-couple and cruises the more than 300 year old Canal du Midi, close to the Mediterranean, the Camargue and Provence.

The Hotel-Barge Caroline offers plenty of space for her three roomy cabins, each with it's own private bathroom and shower. You'll find also a comfortable dining and launch area and the 'al fresco' dining area up on deck.

The unique scenery in the heart of Southern France will get you caught immediately. The canal surrounded by plane trees, the unique oval locks, aqueducts, the many vineyards.

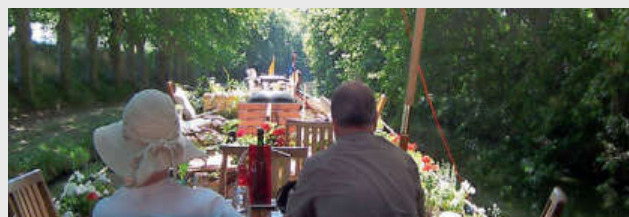
Enjoy the delightful evenings up on deck after another 4-course 'bon vivant' dinner.

The daily excursions guided personally by Uli in Caroline's air-conditioned Mercedes minivan are showing the beauty and history of the Languedoc-Roussillon.

Perhaps the most memorable part of your trip will be the creative daily gourmet dishes prepared by your Chef Ute. They are paired with the best of local wines chosen by Uli, your Captain.

We, Ute & Uli, are here to make your holiday your experience of a lifetime. Being sailors all our lives now we love to share our personal experiences with you on the inland waterways, showing you 'our' France.

Wouldn't it be a shame, if you had to wait until next year?



Ute & Uli Weber
Phone from abroad:
+33 - 603 309 522

Email: info@bargecaroline.com

www.bargecaroline.com

HOTEL BARGE CAROLINE

Quick guide to... Perpignan



I've heard that the city feels Spanish. Is that right?

Yes. Capital of the Pyrénées-Orientales *département*, the town is just 30 kilometres from the border with Spain and was once the capital of the Kingdom of Majorca.

I'm intrigued! What's there to see?

The attractive medieval centre is filled with narrow alleys and orange and peach-hued buildings. Wander around the central square, Place Péri, which is next to the flower-fringed River Bassa and is full of charming cafés. You then pass Le Castillet (*main picture*), a small medieval fortress serving as the main entry point to the old city. A must-see is the imposing Palace of the Kings of Majorca, which is a testament to Perpignan's rich history and has beautiful views from its position on a hill to the south of the old town.

I see it's near the coast too... any good beaches nearby?

Absolutely! Canet-Plage in the resort of Canet-en-Roussillon is a short drive along the D617; the wide, golden sandy beach stretches for miles along the Mediterranean coast.

What about places to eat and drink?

There are lots. For a great cup of coffee in a comfy chair head to Le République'Café (tel: (Fr) 4 68 51 11 64), in Place de la République. For a spot of people watching, there's Le Grand Café de la Poste (tel: (Fr) 4 68 51 25 65), in the city centre next to Le Castillet. When it comes to lunch the city doesn't disappoint; try Lou Grilladou (tel: (Fr) 4 68 34 86 81, www.restaurant-lou-grilladou.fr, menus from €13), which serves classic French and Catalan food, and Les Épicuriens (tel: (Fr) 4 68 67 91 54, menus from €14), another Catalan place, with a menu that

changes daily. Enjoy a cocktail or two at Le Zinc bar (tel: (Fr) 4 68 35 08 80), or paint the town red at Le Cosy (tel: (Fr) 4 68 66 02 57), a nightclub-style bar with music for dancing.

That all sounds great. Where should I stay?

For a comfortable stay on the edge of the city centre try the Hotel Ibis Perpignan Centre (tel: (Fr) 4 68 35 62 62, www.accorhotels.com), with 102 well-appointed rooms and a restaurant. Doubles from €74.

Get me there quick!

Perpignan-Rivesaltes airport is 8km from the city centre and is served by Ryanair from London Stansted. Return flights from £39.99.

Peter Stewart

For more information visit www.perpignan-tourisme.com

TRAVEL NEWS



TAKING THE TRAIN

Rail travellers to France this winter will be able to book with Voyages-sncf.com from 15 October. Tickets go on sale at 5am for all French routes between 13 December and 4 February 2016 inclusive. Whether you are heading to the ski slopes, stocking up on treats at a Christmas market or enjoying a city break, it is advisable to book early. Tel: 0844 848 5848 www.voyages-sncf.com

ALL-WEATHER PARIS

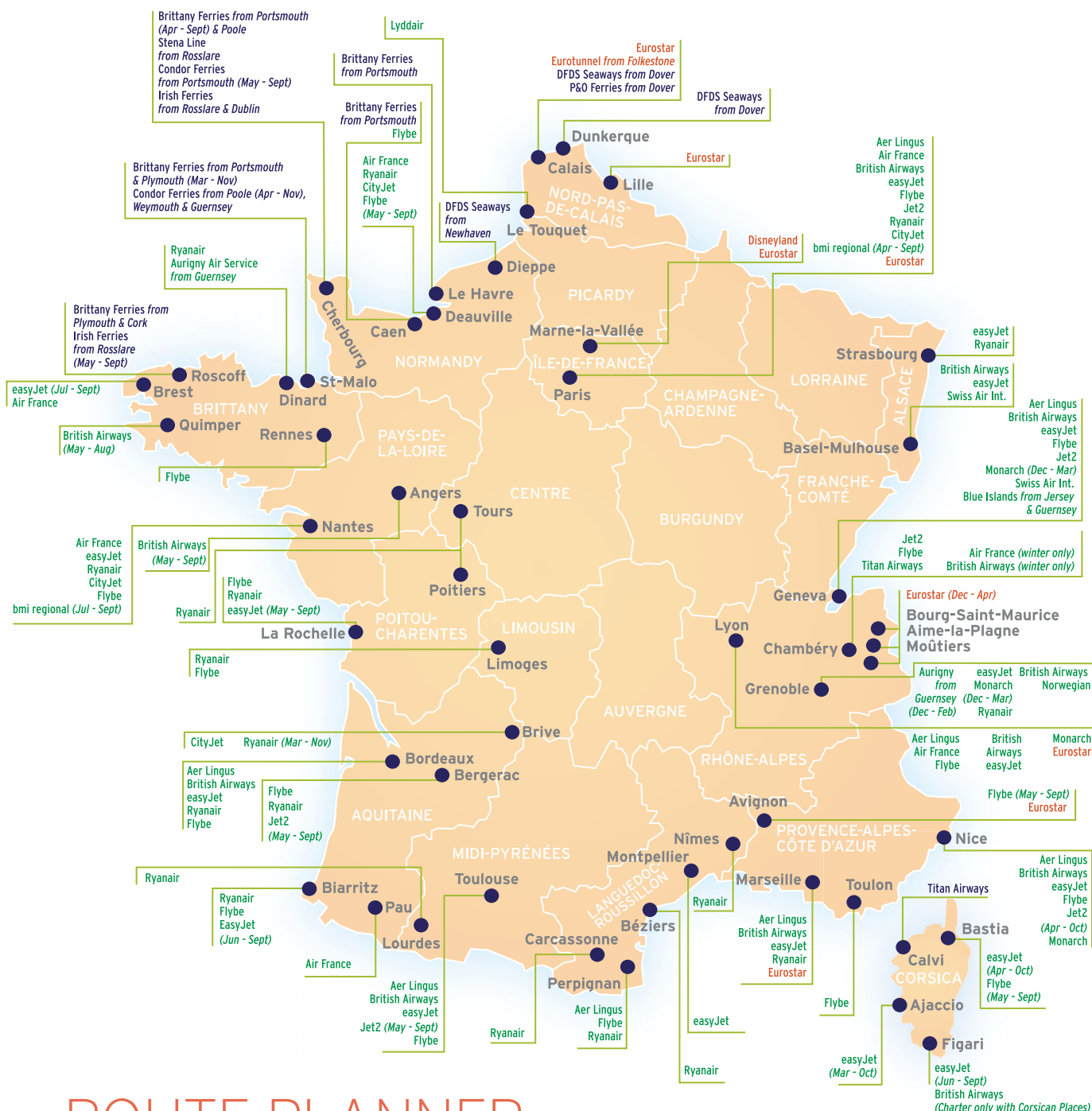
Visitors to Paris now have a handy free app telling them what to see or do according to the season and the weather. The Seasonal Cities app, which can be downloaded on to an iPhone or iPad, has just been updated for autumn. Once you have arrived, the app recommends activities based on the weather forecast for the next few days, allowing you to make the most of your stay come rain or shine. www.itunes.com



EUROSTAR UPGRADE

Travel across the Channel with Eurostar this autumn and you might well be on its latest generation of trains. The remodelled E300 (*pictured above*) has an updated livery and a redesigned interior that includes passenger information screens, larger seats and power sockets in all coaches, and USB charging ports in first class. The next stage in a £1 billion investment will be the launch of 17 new E320 trains towards the end of 2015. www.eurostar.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: FOTOLIA



ROUTE PLANNER

Plan your journey to France with our handy map and directory

FERRIES

Brittany Ferries
Tel: 0871 244 1400
www.brittanyferries.co.uk

Condor Ferries
Tel: 0845 609 1024
www.condorferries.co.uk

DFDS Seaways
Tel: 0871 574 7235
www.dfdsseaways.co.uk

Irish Ferries
Tel: (ROI) 818 300 400
www.irishferries.com

P&O Ferries

Tel: 0871 664 2121
www.poferries.com

Stena Line
Tel: (ROI) 1 204 7777
www.stenaline.ie

RAII

Eurostar
Tel: 03448 118 444
www.eurostar.com

Eurotunnel
Tel: 0844 335 3535
www.eurotunnel.com

Voyages-sncf.com

Tel: 0844 848 5848
www.voyages-sncf.com

AIRLINES

Aer Lingus
Tel: 0871 718 2020
www.aerlingus.com

Air France
Tel: 0871 663 3777
www.airfrance.co.uk

Aurigny Air Services
Tel: 01481 822 886
www.aurigny.com

Blue Islands

Tel: 0845 620 2122
www.blue
islands.com

bmi regional
Tel: 0330 333 7998
www.bmi-regional.com

British Airways
Tel: 0844 493 0787
www.britishairways.com

CityJet
Tel: 0871 405 2020
www.cityjet.com

easyJet

Tel: 0330 365 5000
www.easyjet.com

Flybe
Tel: 0371 700 2000
www.flybe.com

Jet2
Tel: 0800 408 1350
www.jet2.com

Lyddair
Tel: 01797 322 207
www.lyddair.com

Monarch
Tel: 0871 940 5040
www.monarch.co.uk

Norwegian

Tel: 0843 378 0888
www.norwegian.com

Ryanair
Tel: 0871 246 0000
www.ryanair.com

Swiss Int. Air
Tel: 0845 601 0956
www.swiss.com

Titan Airways
Tel: 01279 680 616
www.titan-airways.co.uk

This month we ask a reader, a professional and a *FRANCE* contributor about their love of France

Travellers' tales

1 What was your last travel experience in France?

2 How would you spend your last €10?

3 What is your best insider tip on France?

A reader...



Stan Le Cornu
Saint Clement, Jersey



I visited the Puy du Fou theme park near Nantes, which was great fun and deserves to see more British visitors.



On a plate of delicious oysters fresh from the fishermen on the slipway in the Breton port of Cancale.

Always try to be polite and speak French to the locals as much as possible. They'll love you for trying!

A travel writer...



Mary Anne Evans,
www.about-france.com,
London



I was in Rochefort on the Atlantic Coast, which went wild when the replica frigate *L'Hermione* returned from the US. (See feature on page 58).



It would have to be a coffee and a calvados as I sat at the bar of a typical French café.

Don't ignore Nord-Pas-de-Calais even if you're hurrying south. Attractions include La Coupole, where Hitler launched his V2 rockets, the Lace Museum in Calais (pictured) and the little-known Matisse Museum in Le Cateau-Cambrésis.



A contributor...



Pierre de Villiers
London

Dashing around Paris from dawn until dusk trying to see as much as I could.



A glass of red wine drunk at an outside table in a Montmartre side-street before I headed for the nearest *fromagerie*.



Water jousting in Sète is an unforgettable experience. Head for the banks of the main Canal Royal in August and take in the spectacle as competitors are knocked into the water.

Are you going to France again soon? Tell us your plans at editorial@francemag.com

Enjoy a fun-filled day out in... Amiens

A day trip to the capital of Picardy offers plenty of things to see and do, as *FRANCE Magazine* discovers

Straddling the River Somme, the city of Amiens is a fascinating blend of old and new with plenty to keep visitors of all ages entertained. Just 90 minutes from the port of Calais, Amiens is the perfect place for a day trip to France with its Gothic cathedral, canals and museum dedicated to the writer Jules Verne.

The city has many attractions to keep the family entertained. For a taste of adventure, visit the impressive Maison Jules Verne, former home of the author of such classic adventures as *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Around the World in Eighty Days*, who lived in Amiens from 1871 to 1905. Venture inside and lose yourself in the fantasy world of the writer, with models, posters and other items inspired by Verne's rich imagination awaiting in every room. Make sure you go up to the attic, which has old trunks packed full of games, puppets and old treasures that children will love to play with.

For those with an even greater appetite for adventure the Parc Zoologique d'Amiens is an excellent choice. Traverse the Earth's great continents as you wander past more than 70 species of animals including elephants, red pandas, zebras, wallabies and antelopes. End your visit on a high with the



elephant-feeding experience, one which youngsters will be talking about for days afterwards.

Amiens is not just a playground for children. The picturesque district of Saint-Leu, characterised by a network of canals interspersed with narrow streets and colourful houses, is perfect for couples looking to take a quiet stroll. Wander through the paved streets, which are brimming with art galleries, bookshops, boutiques and enticing cafés and restaurants.

In the same district you will find the city's star attraction, the Unesco-listed Notre-Dame Cathedral, which dates from the 13th century. Measuring 145 metres long and 42 metres high, it is one of the largest Gothic buildings in the world and has beautiful displays of sculptures on its main façade.

Amiens abounds in green spaces, some of which were created when the city was rebuilt following heavy bombing near the end of World War I. These include *Les Hortillonages* – floating market gardens covering 300 hectares along a series of waterways. Hop on board one of the 12-person boats (known as *barques à cornet*) and enjoy a leisurely cruise past the seven working farms which have provided the city with vegetables and flowers since medieval times. Every Saturday the gardeners sell their produce at the water market in Saint-Leu. For a green oasis in the heart of the city the Parc Saint-Pierre is a wonderful place to spend some time. Set over 22 hectares, the contemporary landscaped park features walking trails, games and plenty of space to unwind.

A day out in Amiens would be incomplete without a visit to the Musée Picardie, one of the largest and most impressive museums in France. Collections stretch from prehistoric times to the 19th century, with highlights including French sculptures from the 17th to the 19th century and Gothic art masterpieces taken from the cathedral.

For more information on where to stay and what to visit, see www.visit-amiens.com

Eurotunnel Le Shuttle is the quickest way to the continent by car. Book early and get the best fares to explore Amiens. Visit www.eurotunnel.com or call 0870 850 8133 to book your crossing.



ABOVE: The Gothic cathedral in Amiens; **RIGHT:** Visitors take a boat trip through the market gardens of *Les Hortillonages*; **TOP:** Waterside cafés in the Saint-Leu district





DAY ONE

Ferry passengers disembarking at Caen-Ouistreham (tel: 0871 244 1400, www.brittanyferries.co.uk) tend to follow the *toutes directions* signs to Caen and beyond. On this trip, take the inside lane on the dual-carriageway and join the slip road (D514) for Cabourg.

A reminder of the D-Day landings comes soon as you cross the River Orne over an iron-girder lifting bridge ①. The original, codenamed Pegasus, and the adjacent house, now a café full of war memorabilia, were among the first to be liberated on 6 June 1944.

Round TRIP

Avoid the dash south from the Caen ferry and meander through the beautiful countryside of the Pays d'Auge and the Alpes Mancelles

If you have arrived too early for a coffee, continue to Cabourg and take a seat at one of its elegant *pâtisseries* before going for a stroll along the resort's grand promenade.

Where Cabourg ② is grand, its hinterland of deep green countryside is reassuringly rustic. This is the Pays d'Auge and once you have followed the D400 away from the coast to follow signs for Beuvron-en-Auge, the road narrows and the verges overflow with hawthorn.

The D49 leads to Beuvron, a *Plus Beau Village* that is a colourful and half-timbered gem ③. Take time to peruse the shops selling knick-knacks, cider and calvados, and have lunch at Le Pavé d'Auge (menus from €40, tel: (Fr) 2 31 79 26 71, www.pavedauge.com) for a Normandy gourmet experience.

From Beuvron head south through the equally pretty Crèvecœur-en-Auge and follow the D16 to Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives. Stop to visit the impressive 11th-century market hall. Its Monday market is among the best in Normandy although you would have to skip lunch in Beuvron.

Continue south to Falaise on the D511 and visit the cream-stoned château on the clifftop (tel: (Fr) 2 31 41 61 44, www.chateau-guillaume-leconquerant.com) where William the Conqueror was born.

Join the A88 at Falaise and then exit at junction 13 near Argentan. Go towards the town, turn right on to the D2 and drive to Carrouges. Book into the Hôtel du Nord – a simple two-star hotel with a good restaurant (doubles from €49, tel: (Fr) 2 33 27 20 14, www.hotel-restaurant-du-nord.fr).

PHOTOGRAPHS: FOTOLIA; PAUL BLOOMFIELD; CHRISTIAN MUSAT/LAMY STOCK PHOTO; HEMIS/JALAMY STOCK PHOTO; FRANCIS CORMON/HEMIS.FR



EASY ITINERARY



DAY TWO

Before leaving Carrouges, visit the château at the foot of the hill. The grand gatehouse makes the main building look small and plain by comparison. The gardens are tranquil, if a little neglected, but the orchard is an ideal picnic spot (guided visits €9, www.carrouges.monuments-nationaux.fr).

Return to Carrouges and take the D909 south. Cross the N12 and follow signs for Saint-Pierre-des-Nids and Saint-Céneri-le-Gérei. This is the so-called Alpes Mancelles, a wooded and hilly area. The road twists and turns to reach Saint-Céneri ④, another *Plus Beau Village*, which lies in a wooded valley carved by the River Sarthe.

Use the car park by the river and walk into the village by following the river upstream to visit the isolated Chapelle Saint-Céneri and then head uphill to view the remarkable frescoes in the 11th-century Romanesque church.

Saint-Céneri has been an artists' haven for more than a century and the highlight of any visit is the *Salle des Décapités*. In the upstairs room of what was once an auberge, Impressionist artists talked and drank by candlelight. The shadows of their heads cast on to the walls were fixed

for all time with soot from the fire (guided visit in French €2.50, tel: (Fr) 2 33 27 84 47, www.amisdesaintceneri.com). Lunch next door at the Auberge des Peintres (tel: (Fr) 2 33 26 49 18).

Continue south via Saint-Léonard-des-Bois by the D146 and the D112. At Sougé-le-Ganelon take the D105 and go south-west towards Sillé-le-Guillaume. Stop short of Sillé at the small lake in the forest for walks and possibly a swim. The beach is another delightful picnic spot.

At Sillé head west to Évron (D310/D32), which has an impressive 13th-century Gothic basilica. After a coffee at one of the cafés on the square take the D7 to Jublains. Here the remains of a Gallo-Roman town are an integral part of the village ⑤. The Roman bathhouse lies beneath the church and the small amphitheatre is still in use. Most impressive is the huge Roman fortress and adjacent museum. After watching a film on the Roman town's importance wander between the fortress's thick walls and admire the view (€4, tel: (Fr) 2 43 58 13 20, www.museeдебublains.fr).

Continue on the D7 to Mayenne and turn south on the N162 for a short way to stay at La Marjolaine near Moulay. The hotel and restaurant are spread between a château and its outbuildings

situated within a small wooded park. The restaurant offers affordable gourmet dining and rooms start from €82 (tel: (Fr) 2 43 00 48 42, www.lamarjolaine.fr).

DAY THREE

The penultimate day begins with a short drive (D34) to Bagnoles-de-l'Orne ⑥. En route stop at Lassay-les-Châteaux to see its two 15th-century castles: an intact fortress and a romantic ruin (www.lassay-tourisme.fr).

Bagnoles looks delightfully incongruous in its forest surroundings: there is a casino, spa, sumptuous belle-époque *manoirs* and hotels, a racecourse and many restaurants and tearooms. Book a treatment at the B'O thermal spa (www.bo-spathermal.com) or take one of the forest walks.

On the hill above the town is the Manoir de la Prise-Tarot, a relatively new boutique B&B in a converted 17th-century *manoir* (rooms from €75, tel: (Fr) 2 33 37 44 06, www.manoir-prise-tarot.fr). For dinner eat at Ô Gayot (tel: (Fr) 2 33 38 44 01, www.ogayot.com) – the bistro version of the renowned Manoir du Lys restaurant nearby. The €26.50 menu is excellent value.

DAY FOUR

Head back to the port at Ouistreham by taking the D336 and D53 to the west of La Ferté-Macé. Follow the D18 north-west to Flers and then the D962/D562 north to Caen. A pleasant detour involves taking the ridge route that follows the steep sides of the Orne Valley by way of the natural landmarks and viewpoints of Le Pain de Sucre and the Rochers de la Houle ⑦. Leave the D562 at Clécy and take a short loop to Launay. ②

Paul Lamarra

Enjoy this article? Tell us where you'd like your road trip to be and we'll plan it out in a future edition.
Email editorial@francemag.com



President François Hollande with government ministers and other representatives who attended the pre-summit conference at the Élysée Palace

Climate crunch time

As 20,000 delegates prepare to descend on Paris for a UN summit, French leaders warn about the cost of failure, as **Paul Lamarra** reports

As Paris prepares to host the COP21 United Nations climate change summit, President François Hollande and his ministers have spoken in almost apocalyptic terms about the consequences of not reaching a deal.

The French government is openly sceptical about the international will to finally agree legally binding targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently to limit temperature rise to 2°C during the 21st century.

"The survival of the planet is at stake," was Prime Minister Manuel Valls's dramatic assessment and to underline his point he added: "The first seven months of this year were the hottest ever recorded.

"If we continue this tendency, temperatures will increase four or five

degrees by the end of the century, which would be an ecological, economic, humanitarian and security cataclysm."

Against a backdrop of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing war-torn Syria, Ecology Minister Ségolène Royal warned her fellow Europeans that they had seen nothing yet. She estimated that at least half of the world's migrants were already fleeing countries afflicted by drought and encroaching deserts.

Speaking at a gathering of the press and interested parties at the Élysée Palace, President Hollande was careful to manage expectations, perhaps conscious of a backlash from the French electorate should there be no agreement.

Joking with the audience, he conceded that hosting the COP21 was a poisoned chalice that no other country had been prepared to accept.

"It is late, it may already be too late," he said. Referring to an existing commitment to raise €100 billion annually to help developing countries deal with the effects of climate change and develop low-carbon economies, he added: "If we are to succeed in Paris it will require not only political commitment but also financing."

An agreement in Paris would give the beleaguered President a fillip, especially as it would take the French public by surprise. A recent survey suggests that 75 per cent of voters believe there is little or no chance of an accord.

Learning from the failures of previous climate change conferences, and in particular Copenhagen six years ago, the French government is taking, a thorough approach in the run-up to the talks, which start at the end of November.



Seventy-five per cent of voters believe there is little or no chance of an accord

Earlier in the month, President Hollande is visiting China to drum up support and Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius will host a pre-COP21 meeting. Michel Sapin, the Economy Minister, has been given the task of raising the necessary money at a meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Peru and at the G20 summit in Turkey.

Despite the doom-laden predictions, French politicians are quietly confident that they can pull off a deal. President Hollande has pointed to China's commitment to reduce its 2005 carbon emission levels by 65 per cent by 2030. The US has agreed to a 17 per cent cut by 2020 and 28 per cent by 2025.

The French government also hopes that Paris and all its charms will put the 20,000 delegates from 195 nations in the best possible frame of mind.

Delegates will be treated to a showcase of French gastronomy with caterers notably pledging not to fly in strawberries from South America.

The summit is being held at the Paris-Le Bourget conference centre in the Seine-Saint-Denis *département* north-east of the capital. The complex will resemble a small town, with its own post office, bank, restaurants and electrically

powered transport system. Official representatives will get a free transport pass so they can venture into the centre of Paris.

During the summit, which runs from 30 November to 11 December, organisers estimate that around 70,000 extra bus and *métro* seats and 412,000 meals will need to be provided. The cost of hosting the event has been put at €187 million, but it is expected to generate more than €100 million for the local and national economy.

Organisers are aiming to attract more than 20,000 members of the public to an adjacent area known as the Civil Society Space. Here non-delegates will be given the chance to debate the issues and glean more information through exhibitions on how climate change is being tackled around the world.

Anyone who is unable to attend will be encouraged to send the delegates video messages from COP boxes around the city. And in an Olympic Games style extravaganza, record producer and composer Marc Cerrone will perform *Supernature 2015*, a sound and light show at the Arc de Triomphe midway through the summit.

If a historic accord is not forthcoming, the delegates will certainly remember that it was in Paris that they failed to agree.

C'est qui?

Every month we cast a spotlight on a figure making headlines

Name: Robert Boulin (died 1979).

Occupation: Former cabinet minister.

Tell me more: There is no intrigue like a French political intrigue and the death of Robert Boulin, a Gaullist cabinet minister, is a prime example.



Found floating in a pond in the forest of Rambouillet, near Paris, in October 1979, Boulin was originally judged to have committed suicide. His family have always disputed this explanation, claiming that the 59-year-old was murdered to make sure that what he knew about government corruption was never exposed.

Now the High Court of Versailles has agreed to open an investigation into whether Boulin was kidnapped and murdered. New witness statements will be taken, including one from a woman who claims to have seen him in a car with two men the day before his death.

At the time, Boulin was Labour Minister under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and became embroiled in accusations surrounding property transactions on the Riviera. The longest-serving minister in post-revolution France, he had served in many ministries.

Before his disappearance, Boulin is said to have written letters to Agence France Presse, *Le Monde* newspaper and his family alleging judicial corruption and a conspiracy involving other ministers.

A second autopsy, performed in 1983, discovered that he had bruising to his face and broken fingers.

Boulin's daughter Fabienne has welcomed the decision to reopen the case, but told *Le Monde*: "For 36 years I have learned to expect manipulation." ➡➡

NEWS IN BRIEF

● More than 200 graves of soldiers who marched on Moscow in 1812 as part of Napoléon's Grande Armée of 600,000 have been discovered on a building site in the German city of Frankfurt. Napoléon fought several bloody

battles in the area as he beat a hasty retreat from Russia in the winter of 1813.

● Viewers of television station France 2 have chosen the Gothic belfry in Arras as the nation's favourite monument. The landmark in Pas-de-Calais was the surprise winner ahead of the cathedral of Le Puy-en-Velay in

Auvergne and the listed 1930s Gare Maritime in Cherbourg.

● Hvala, a brown bear released in the Pyrénées in 2010, has given birth to two cubs. This is the third generation to be born as part of a re-introduction programme. Monitors estimate that there are now 30 bears in the Pyrénées.

La grande question

Every month we explain the background to a top news story

Is the summit of Mont Blanc in France or Italy?

The Italian government has been asked to intervene in a dispute between the French town of Chamonix and the Italian town of Courmayeur over the exact location of the border on the Mont Blanc massif that lies between them.

The Italians assert that tradition and Nato convention places the border on the watershed – a ridge dividing different river systems – and that both countries share the 4,810-metre summit of Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco in Italian). However, the French claim that the principal peaks lie entirely within France.

Now the Italians have accused Eric Fournier, mayor of Chamonix, of acting outside his jurisdiction when he ordered that a gate giving access to the Giant Glacier be locked on safety grounds.

The mayor wanted to stop tourists who are arriving by cable car from straying on to the glacier. The Italians are furious because it prevents experienced climbers accessing the Turin Refuge. They insist the gate is in Italy.

The dispute follows an incident in the summer when French bulldozers pushed blocks marking the border 150 metres back into 'Italian' territory. Border tensions have been growing since the opening of new high-altitude cable car on the Italian side in June. No French representatives attended the opening ceremony.



Ministers split on 35-hour week

Controversy continues to surround the French Socialist government's attitude to the 35-hour working week. While the Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron (pictured centre) has spoken out against it, Prime Minister Manuel Valls (right) has sought to reassure trade unions that the law is not up for discussion.

When the working week was reduced from 39 hours in 2000, it was envisaged that the move would create more jobs, but Macron, speaking to business leaders, described this as a "false idea". Unemployment in France now stands at ten per cent, with a record 3.5 million out of work.

A recent survey of French workers has revealed that more than 70 per cent would be prepared to work longer hours if there were a corresponding increase in pay.

Despite the law, French employees work an average 39.5 hours a week through overtime and extra holidays.



D-Day village faces battle over name

A Normandy village that was among the first to be liberated in the hours just before the D-Day landings has revealed controversial plans to change its name.

Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, close to Utah Beach and famously liberated by the US 101st Airborne division, is considering changing its name to Montmerville following a merger with the nearby *communes* of Brucheville and Vierville.

The announcement has caused anger locally and in the US over fears



that it would erode the village's link with the dramatic events of 6 June 1944. The writer and historian Gilles Perrault attended a public meeting

in the village. "Rob Sainte-Marie-du-Mont of its name? People say the name is our identity – they gave their guts for you," *Ouest-France* newspaper reported him as saying.

Sainte-Marie-du-Mont's role in D-Day was given new prominence after the close-quarter battle for the village was depicted in the 2001 TV mini-series *Band of Brothers*.

Mayor takes on big stores over Sunday opening

Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist mayor of Paris, is stepping up her fight to stop the city's *grands magasins* and other chain stores from opening on Sunday and to midnight on weekdays in 12 designated 'tourist zones'.

Extending Sunday and evening opening was made possible by a law passed in August which seeks to stimulate economic growth by persuading foreign tourists to increase their spending.

Hidalgo, who has opposed the law from the outset, says it completely misunderstands the situation in Paris. The mayor believes that the move threatens the 15,000 small shops that already open in the capital on a Sunday and has vowed to ensure that Paris does not become a city "dedicated to consumerism".



PHOTOGRAPHS: DREAMSTIME; CHAMUSSEY/SIPA; SHUTTERSTOCK; FRANCIS CORMON/HEMIS.FR; PHOTOS 12/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; ADDITIONAL REPORTING: PAUL LAMARRA

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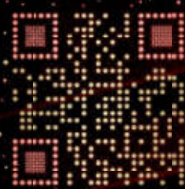
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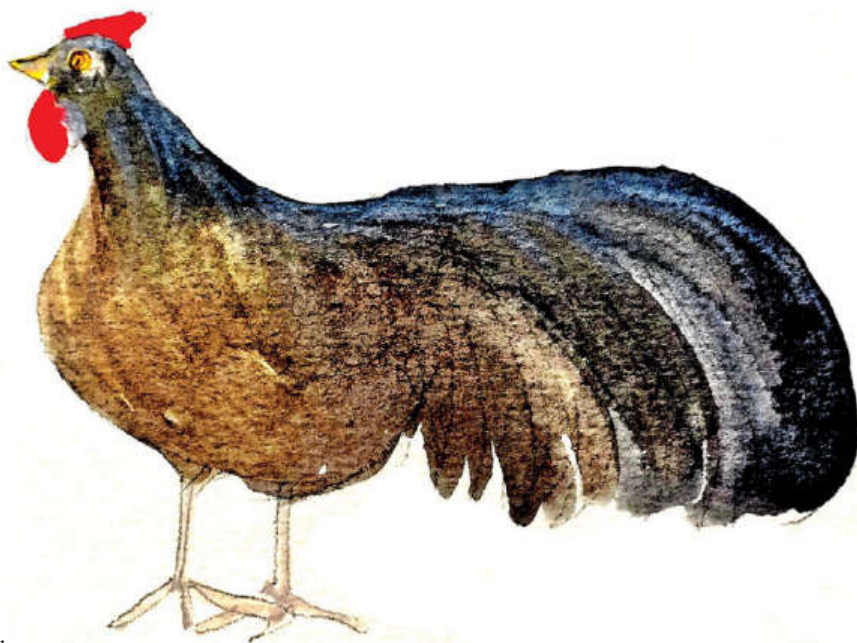
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Vignette Samatan market

Author **Amanda Hodgkinson** shops for chickens in a village near her Gascony home



You want to buy pullovers?" René, our neighbouring farmer, 84 years old, stands in my courtyard in blue overalls and the tartan slippers that he wears all the time now. He holds out a basket of farm eggs.

A chicken is a *poule*; a pullover is a *pull*. I live in the Gers *département* in the heart of Gascony, where the local accent is as thick and rich as a good *cassoulet*. My British accent is confusing him.

"No, no," I say. "*Les poules*." I flap my arms, funky-chicken style. "For eggs."

Is there a disappointed look in his eyes? René has been bringing me eggs ever since we moved here and in return I give him coffee, a slice of cake and as much time as he wants to chat.

"Samatan," he says, reluctantly. "That's the best place to go."

Samatan on a Monday morning holds one of the most authentic markets in France. Around 50 kilometres west of Toulouse, the village has its roots deep in rural life. Since medieval times, its market has been an important trading place and social hub for the region. Here you can buy chickens and, no doubt, plenty of pullovers; also locally grown fruit and vegetables through the seasons, fashion clothes and farm clothes, shoes, jewellery, garden tools, plants, flowers, cheeses, meats, charcuterie, music, mattresses, livestock, honey, wines, Armagnac and – not for the faint-hearted – freshly slaughtered ducks, geese and their livers.

I arrive early and walk into bustling crowds. In the late 19th century this market would have had teeth-pullers and showmen, charlatans, magicians and gamblers. You could meet the mole catcher or the snake finder and see the men who earned a living calling out the hours. At midnight they would dutifully inform the dead in the cemetery of the lateness of the day.

Today, Samatan market retains that kind of rough-edged magic, even if all you do is sit at a café, people-watching.




Former *FRANCE Magazine* columnist Amanda Hodgkinson is author of the *New York Times* best-seller *22 Britannia Road*, and its sequel, *Spilt Milk*, which is out now. For more information, visit www.amandahodgkinson.com

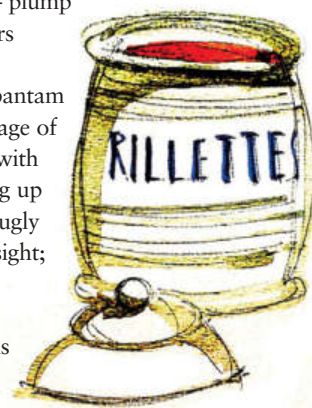
René says I must buy Gascon Noir hens. This is no fancy fowl, but a decent egg-layer and good for the pot. I go into the livestock building, which is heaving with people looking at cages of songbirds, puppies, kittens, rabbits, ferrets, black pigs, goats, pigeons, geese, ducks and every colour and breed of chicken you could imagine.

I buy four Gascons Noirs – plump black hens with golden feathers around the throat. And then I see a strange-looking black bantam hen. All alone, perched on a cage of ducks, she has frizzy feathers with a few snow-white ones sticking up on her head. She might be an ugly duckling, but it's love at first sight; a *coup de foudre*. I buy her for €20.

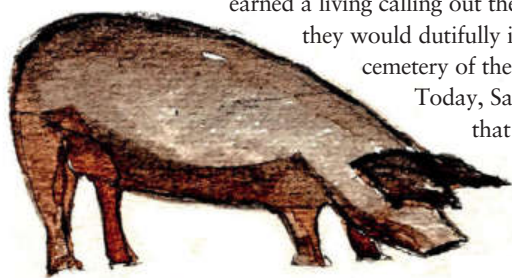
We christen her Iris. René is horrified: €20? Tourist prices. What possible use is she? Too small to eat and no good for eggs. Poor Iris. She fluffs her crinkled feathers and retreats into the henhouse.

All my Samatan market hens lay well, but it turns out that Iris is the best. Each day she lays a perfect egg, white as a sugared almond.

I ask René to advise me on keeping hens and he takes his role very seriously. All summer, we have our coffee by the henhouse, sitting on deckchairs watching Iris. René has never seen such a funny-looking hen. Even when he is sad about getting old, watching Iris cheers him up. A bit of Samatan market magic no less. 



{ A strange-looking bantam hen perches all alone on a cage of ducks; it's love at first sight



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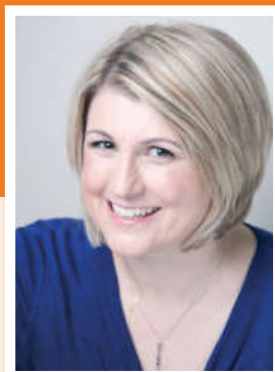
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Dear Reader

We have loved choosing the 14 beautiful glossy photographs that make up the *FRANCE Calendar 2016*. Each one depicts a beautiful time and place in the country you love and promises to inspire future trips and evoke happy memories as you turn each page through the year.

Bon voyage!

Carolyn

FRANCE Magazine Editor

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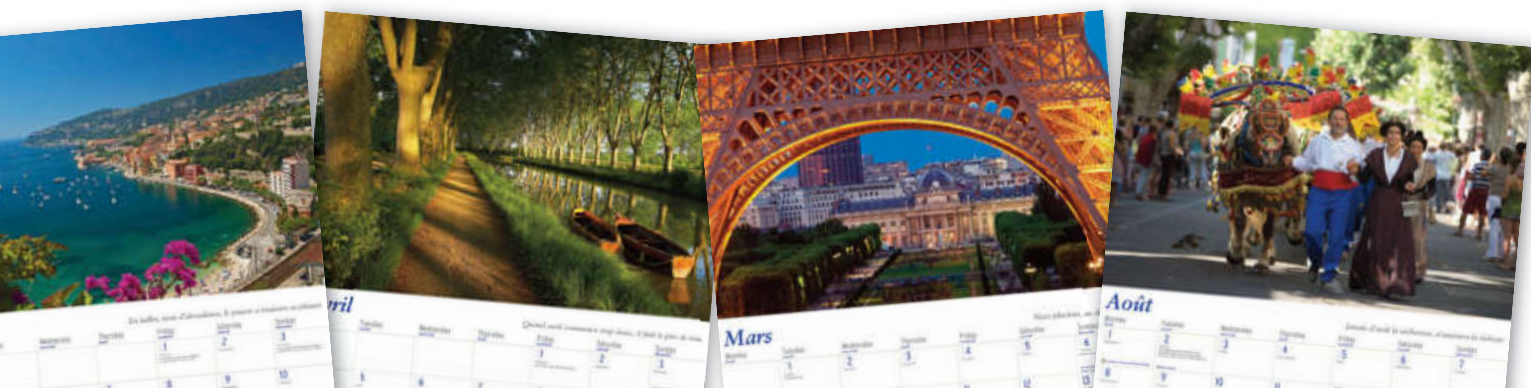
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READER PHOTO COMPETITION

The winner of this month's competition is Stu Gordon, from Bend, Oregon, USA, with his image of a sunset over Lac Blanc in the Haut-Rhin *département* of Alsace.

Send us your holiday picture capturing the essence of France – either to our online reader gallery or by email – and we'll publish the best image in next month's *FRANCE Magazine*. The winner will receive two great prizes: a panoramic pod for taking 360° landscape shots on their smartphone (£15.99 from www.iwantoneofthose.com) and £50 of credit from photo personalisation specialist Photobox (www.photobox.co.uk). To enter the December competition, send your high-resolution image to editorial@francemag.com or upload it to *FRANCE Magazine*'s Flickr page, www.flickr.com/groups/france_magazine by 19 October. See the Flickr page for terms and conditions.



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Share your thoughts, tips and memories with us! Send your letter to:

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BOÎTE AUX LETTRES

STAR
LETTER

Lighthouse delight

The delight on the face of my four-year-old son Matthew (pictured) when he picked up October's *FRANCE Magazine* (issue 205) and saw Ploumanac'h lighthouse in Brittany was wonderful to see. "That's the lighthouse we went to in France with all the pink rocks!" he shrieked.

Despite spending many years holidaying in Brittany, this summer was the first time that we had visited the Côte de Granit Rose – but it won't be our last.

We parked at Plage de Trestraou in the small town of Perros-Guirec, where it was high tide and the surfers were out in force. From there we walked the GR34 past the signal station on the hill to see the famous pink rock formations. The day was perfect, with clear blue skies and the sun lighting up the rocks; we certainly saw it at its best.

The highlight for my two children was the lighthouse itself, which you leave the main path to reach. We had to climb up and down steps cut into the rocks and then walk over a bridge to get to it.

We arrived in the small and picturesque cove of Ploumanac'h in time



for lunch and ice creams. It was an easy walk for families, with wide paths and good surfaces, which is unusual on the *Sentier des Douaniers* around Brittany, having walked for many kilometres along it with two small children! We spent the

f Lynn Legacy
I have such wonderful memories of tasting lemon-flavoured madeleines in France.



@martinwhybrow

**Great to read in
@francemagazine about
petition for vegetarian
option in all French schools.
A few more restaurants
could follow suit too!**

rest of the afternoon playing on the beautiful, sandy beach in Perros-Guirec.

Thank you, *FRANCE Magazine*, for bringing back such lovely memories of my family's 'best walk' in France.

Heather Macey
Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Brittany rhythms

October's *FRANCE Magazine* (No. 205) was a cracking issue, particularly the feature on Breton dancing. I was in Brittany during early August and took part in the medieval *fête* held every two years in the delightful walled town of Moncontour.

The day started with a service in the Église Saint-Mathurin in Place Penthievre and then everyone moved outside to watch the jugglers, stilt walkers, snake charmers and troubadours. As the day wore on, the Breton dancing got faster and more frantic, and the troubadours' songs more risqué!

During my second week I stayed with a friend in Saint-Vincent-sur-Oust in the south of the Morbihan *département*. We walked to the beautiful Île aux Pies and had lunch by the river and visited other places including the small town of La Gacilly (pictured below) which was mentioned in the same issue's feature on eco-friendly breaks. I suppose my

Say bonjour to...

The City of Bath Pétanque Club

The City of Bath Pétanque Club was formed in 2005 when some players in the local league formed an association to play against teams in Aix-en-Provence, the city's French twinning partner.

Ten years on, the club has more than 50 members and meets at several terrains in the city. Club nights are held in Alexandra Park on Monday e October and focus on practice and coaching; more relaxed get-togethers are held in Queen Square on Wednesday mornings.

Members take part in tournaments in the UK and overseas including an annual event in Queen Square. There are also up to five informal *mêlées* a year, one of which is held on the weekend nearest to the *Fête Nationale* on 14 July. The annual tour to Aix is a highlight and in May, 11 members spent an enjoyable long weekend in the southern French city, taking part in a number of *mêlées* alongside their hosts.

At home the club has been either champion or runner-up in the Bath Thursday Boules League for the past four years and hopes to welcome even more members in time for the 2016 season. They also encourage anyone who has never played pétanque to come and have a go. www.bathboules.co.uk

Do you belong to a group with French connections? Tell us about it by emailing editorial@francemag.com or writing to the address on the facing page.



accommodation could be termed eco-friendly, as it was a caravan in my friend's garden, but it was comfortable and peaceful, surrounded by fields.

Having found Breton dancing and La Gacilly in the issue, I then came across the feature on France's best walks. You hit the right button again as I intend to walk part of the Pyrénées next year, so the information about the area was very useful. I also enjoyed the 'Round Trip' along the Mediterranean coast from Montpellier to Collioure, an area I know well, having owned a house inland from Perpignan for 20 years.

Lyn Hardy
Dummer, Hampshire

READER POLL

How often do you receive a warm welcome in France?

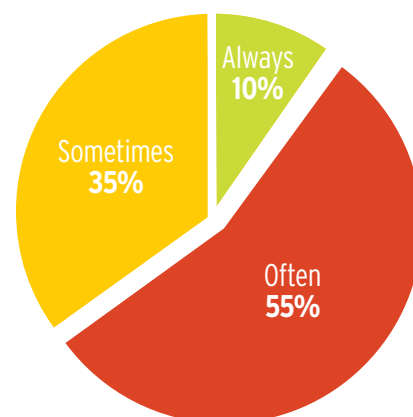
☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

Fill in our online poll at:

<http://warmwelcome.questionpro.com>

LAST MONTH WE ASKED:

When on holiday in France how often do you travel by train?



You can find *FRANCE Magazine's* new updated index for issues 100-200 on our website via this link: www.completefrance.com/FMIndex



PHOTOGRAPHS: FOTOLIA

Where to stay... with your pet

Owners and their four-legged friends will find these French stays provide all the right creature comforts

▲▼ CHÂTEAU LA THULIÈRE, Dordogne

At this stately 19th-century mansion, 30 kilometres from Bergerac, small dogs and their owners can expect a friendly welcome from Patch – the owners' own spaniel. Visiting canines are welcomed to stay for a fee of €20 a night, which includes being presented with a bowl and blanket. With pets free to roam the hotel at leisure, guests can feel at ease as they relax beside the roaring fire in the drawing room. Step outside and there are acres of private parkland, woods and fields on the doorstep, perfect for walkies or a game of throw and fetch.

24400 Saint-Front-de-Pradoux

Tel: 0330 100 3180

www.mrandmrssmith.com

Doubles from £104; pets €20.



▲ LE CLOS DE MAUSSANNE, Béziers

This boutique B&B, housed in a beautifully restored former convent surrounded by rolling vineyards, has an invitingly relaxed attitude to pets and its own clutch of resident house cats. Four-legged visitors can mingle with the local moggies or take some exercise in the dog playground, which has its own set of jumps. Guests, meanwhile, can relax by the pool or enjoy a fine-dining experience offered by owner and chef extraordinaire Bruno Saurel. Beyond Béziers, the medieval centre of Pézenas and the beaches of the Mediterranean are within easy reach.

Route de Pézenas, 34500 Béziers, tel: (Fr) 4 67 39 31 81, www.sawdays.co.uk

Doubles from €125, including breakfast.



CHÂTEAU-HÔTEL ANDRÉ ZILTENER, Burgundy

This beautiful estate nestles beside Burgundy's famed *Route des Vins* in the village of Chambolle-Musigny, between Beaune and Dijon, and makes an ideal retreat for both animal lovers and wine connoisseurs. Past the columned threshold, guests have their pick of ten graceful rooms and suites, each one named after a *Grand Cru* wine, where high ceilings meet period furnishings to create a feeling of old-world romance. Pet owners will get rooms with direct access to the gardens. The hotel holds free tasting sessions in the cellars and even has its own wine museum. Beyond the hotel, walking trails allow owners and their pets to explore the area's vineyards and picturesque villages. Alternatively, borrow one of the hotel's free bikes and follow the *Voie des Vignes* cycle routes.

Rue de la Fontaine,
21200 Chambolle-Musigny

Tel: (Fr) 3 80 62 41 62

www.chateau-ziltener.com

Open March to November. Doubles from €250, including breakfast; pets €20.



▲ CHÂTEAUX DES TESNIÈRES, Brittany

High ceilings, eclectic art and period furniture give this luxury bed and breakfast, near the medieval town of Vitré, a magical allure. The elegant 19th-century chateau is already home to a friendly labrador and two cats, and visiting pets are also welcome for a nightly charge of €10. The six hectares of parkland, dappled with old oak trees, are perfect for your pooch to stretch their legs, while the hotel's salon, library and five spacious suites provide owners with the ultimate in tranquil breaks.

35370 Torcé, tel: (Fr) 2 99 49 65 02, www.i-escape.com

Doubles from £85 including breakfast.



▲► CHÂTEAU DE LA MOUCHÈRE, Orne

Tucked away up a long tree-lined lane, surrounded by the rolling hills of the Perche Regional Natural Park, this charming *chambre d'hôtes* is owned by ex-university professor Roger Huss and

his historian wife Marie-Monique. Their chateau will soon feel like a home-from-home for guests, who are invited to share an evening aperitif and who can also make use of the helpful 'resource cupboard' filled with easily forgotten holiday items. Such warm hospitality



extends to pooches too, who can befriend the resident dogs, Carrington and Dalloway, and share their canine reserves of food, blankets and water. While four-legged visitors are welcome inside the chateau, most will prefer exploring the gardens and nearby park. Afterwards, muddy paws can be washed off in the 'dog bathroom' - where warm water and towels are provided.

61130 Saint-Cyr-la-Rosière

Tel: (Fr) 2 33 83 02 99

www.lamouchere.com

Doubles from €85 (€65 from second night) including breakfast, pets €10. ➡➡



▲► LE BRISTOL, Paris

Crossing the threshold of a luxury Paris pad with your energetic pooch or puss doesn't need to be daunting. The super-swanky Hôtel Le Bristol has its own highly cherished felines: the white Burmese Fa-Raon and his lady playmate Kléopatre. You'll normally spot them, bejewelled in designer collars, lounging around in the hotel's sumptuous salons or playing outside in the perfectly pruned rose gardens. Visiting pets will be treated with equal reverence; the hotel provides a special dog/cat cushion in bedrooms and two bowls with bottled water, while dogs are spoilt with a special *macaron* treat. There is even the option of personalising rugs and dog bowls with your pet's name that can be taken home as gifts. The concierge is happy to assist with advice on pet-friendly sites around the city or any dog- or cat-sitting needs.



112 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré,
75008 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 53 43 43 00
www.lebristolparis.com
Doubles from €830; pets €44.

LA CÔTE SAINT-JACQUES, Burgundy

Enjoy a restful weekend away at this hotel and spa that stretches out along the bank of the River Yonne in the historic town of Joigny. While guests unwind in the treatment rooms and swimming pool, the affable staff will take care of all kinds of furry or feathered companions; their most exotic visitor to date being a lively parrot called Wilson. No extra supplement is charged for pet stays, and four-legged friends are free to accompany owners into bedrooms, the restaurant, or outside on the terrace for a bowl of water and a treat. The hotel's crowning glory is the two-Michelin-starred restaurant run by chef and owner Jean-Michel Lorain, who also offers his trade secrets to guests in the cookery school.

14 Faubourg de Paris, 89300 Joigny
Tel: (Fr) 3 86 62 09 70, www.cotesaintjacques.com
Doubles from €150.

PANORAMA DU PYLA, Gironde

Campsites make a pet's paradise – after pitching up in the great outdoors, there are countless walks, games and play areas on the doorstep, with no need to worry about too much tail wagging or loud barking. Yelloh! Village's Panorama du Pyla, on the Baie d'Arcachon, has a mixture of cottages, chalets and camping areas surrounded by pine trees, with the Dune du Pyla – Europe's highest sand dune – as a backdrop. On-site facilities include grocery shops, bike hire and a restaurant with panoramic views of the bay.

Grande Dune du Pyla, Route de Biscarrosse, 33115 Pyla-sur-Mer
Tel: (Fr) 4 66 73 9739

www.yellohvillage.co.uk/camping/panorama_du_pyla

Camping from €18 per night; cottages from €39.



▲ MALOINIÈRE DES TRAUCHANDIÈRES, Saint-Malo

Situated close to the ferry port of Saint-Malo, this restored 16th-century *manoir* has been turned into a welcoming bed-and-breakfast where dogs stay for free. Run by the charming Claude and Agnès, the house is steeped in old-world elegance, with rich oak panelling, chandeliered salons and antique-decked bedrooms. Dogs can spend the night sleeping in their owners' rooms before enjoying daytimes in the grounds. Claude and Agnès are happy to offer advice about nearby walks and dog-friendly beaches. In addition to the three double suites, there is a four-bedroom self-catering cottage that is ideal for families or groups.

Alberville, Saint-Jouan-des-Guéréts, 35430 Saint-Malo
Tel: (Fr) 2 99 81 38 30
www.sawdays.co.uk
Doubles from €80, including breakfast.



▲ ABBAYE DE LA BUSSIÈRE, Burgundy

Canine lodgings don't come much grander than Abbaye de la Bussière; a spectacular 12th-century abbey south-west of Dijon where seven hectares of parks, gardens and a lake, a host of pet perks and the hospitality of the dog-loving family owners create a truly special holiday setting. Brits Clive and Tanith Cummings, along with their trusty pooch Holtson, took over the abbey ten years ago, and have painstakingly preserved the history and tranquillity of the place – you'll find interiors adorned in stone pillars, original frescoes and magnificent stained-glass windows. Fifteen luxurious bedrooms are spread across the abbey, although many guests prefer the freedom of staying in one of the five suites tucked away in a historic annexe building in the parkland. After working up an appetite exploring the grounds, guests (with their pets) can dine either in the Michelin-starred restaurant or the informal lunchtime bistro. The abbey's location in the heart of Burgundy makes it a convenient base for exploring the region's newly Unesco-inscribed vineyards or a superb stopover on the drive south.

Route Départementale 33, 21360 La Bussière-sur-Ouche
Tel: (Fr) 3 80 49 02 29, www.abbayedelabussiere.fr
Doubles from €225, breakfast €25.

► MONTALEMBERT, Paris

This five-star boutique bolthole on Paris's Left Bank offers small, well-trained dogs a dose of luxury with its VID (very important dog) service. On arrival, your travel-fatigued canine will be given a water bowl, while a cosy basket and miniature bottles of dog shampoo are ready in the bedrooms. The pampered pooches won't go hungry either; they are free to enter the hotel restaurant where the chef will create a special canine menu upon request. The concierge will organise dog sitting and walking so that owners are free to visit the city's less dog-friendly addresses, be it chef Joël Robuchon's



famed Atelier restaurant next door or the Musée du Louvre just across the River Seine.

3 Rue de Montalembert, 75007 Paris
Tel: 0330 100 3180
www.mrandmrsmith.com
Doubles from £287.



PET TRAVEL CHECKLIST

Before taking your dog, cat or even ferrets to France, make sure you comply with the various requirements for entering and leaving the UK:

- Fit your pet with a microchip. This should be done at the vets before vaccination.
- A vaccination against rabies is needed at least 21 days before travel. Get regular booster vaccinations when they are due.
- Dogs must be treated for tapeworms between 24 hours and 120 hours (five days) before you return to the UK.
- A passport issued by your vet is needed to officially prove your pet has been micro-chipped, vaccinated and treated for tapeworms.

For more information visit:
www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad

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The abbey on Le Mont-Saint-Michel rises out of the mist above a flock of sheep on the salt marshes

To be a pilgrim

The high cliffs and crashing waves of the Cotentin coast provide a dramatic backdrop as **Paul Bloomfield** experiences Le Mont-Saint-Michel in all its glory

Somewhere on the lofty clifftops near Champeaux, on the rugged western coast of the Cotentin Peninsula, lies the most beautiful kilometre in France. That's the big claim, anyway. Sorting out the details, though, is where the waters became muddled.

"Who said it? Ah... well, I'm not too sure," smiled Bernard, my sunny host who had recounted the assertion, as he dropped me off at the sweeping sands of Carolles-Plage. "I think it might have been General Eisenhower... or perhaps Édouard Herriot..."

I would doubtless enjoy the winsomeness of the landscape, I answered, whoever first rhapsodised about its charm. If, that is, I could work out where it was. Funnily enough, there's no marker post indicating the start or end of the exalted stretch, and Bernard wasn't certain how to find it, either.

The thing is, it doesn't matter. Whether it was the American general, who was based here in 1944, or the three-times French prime minister who asked, "Isn't this the most beautiful kilometre of France?" the upshot is the same. The walk along the cliffs between Carolles-Plage and Saint-Jean-le-Thomas is sensational. If you like waves crashing on craggy rocks, wheeling birds, jaunty flowers and history in spades, this is the spot for you.

In fact, there are plenty more of those treats around the edge of La Manche *département* – most of them accessible on foot, if you're so inclined. A waymarked trail signed with the familiar red-and-white stripes of a *Grande Randonnée* shimmies around the Cotentin Peninsula, covering around 430 kilometres from Isigny-sur-Mer to Le Mont-Saint-Michel. En route it passes the D-Day Utah Beach and traverses the bird-rich dunes and wetlands of the Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin Regional Natural Park; it takes in the historic harbours of Barfleur and Cherbourg; and it climbs Cap de la Hague and the Nez de Jobourg, where waves pound the rocks 130 metres below mainland Europe's highest sea cliffs.

The path goes by many names: the *Tour du Cotentin*, the *Sentier des Douaniers* (Coastguards' Path), *Sentier du Littoral* (Coastal Path) or simply the GR223. But I had another epithet in mind when I set out: the Pilgrims' Trail. From the early Middle Ages, the devout would set out from the shrine of St Swithun at Winchester Cathedral along what is now known as the Three Saints' Way to Portsmouth, crossing to Barfleur or Cherbourg and continuing to the hallowed abbey of Le Mont-Saint-Michel, which is surrounded by the waters where Normandy and Brittany face off across the bay. ➡➡



PHOTOGRAPH: MARC LEROUX/COT-MANCHE

I aimed to mimic a *miquelot*, the label for such pilgrims, though on a modest scale: I would join the path at the seaside resort of Carolles-Plage south of Granville and hike to Le Bec d'Andaine at Genêts, departure point for the barefoot walk across the treacherous sands to the abbey on its rocky outcrop. It is a moderate meander of 17 kilometres – one of them, reputedly, that most beautiful of all.

The start of my stroll was promising. The morning was hazy but bright as I set out from the southern end of a five-kilometre belt of sand backed by a succession of seaside resorts. Carolles-Plage is among the most pleasant, having sprouted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; its attractive Victorian and Edwardian villas, plus a sprinkling of less appealing, blocky art-deco buildings wedged between two cliffs, give it something of the feel of a stereotypical English resort – Weymouth, perhaps, or Southwold.

Steps lead up between a cluster of bathing huts, weaving past dandelions and pinks to the viewpoint at Pignon-Butor, below the Croix Paqueray. It's a spot that demanded a halt – and not just because I was out of breath after the steep climb. Gazing down from this 60-metre-high eyrie, I saw the beach stretched in a seemingly endless golden ribbon north towards Granville; a kayaker was preparing to paddle out, and there was even a swimmer (albeit in a wetsuit – the Channel was still nippy in early May). A trotting horse pulled a two-wheeled gig across the sand – a reminder of this region's equestrian heritage – and a kitesurfer checked his harness before taking to the waves. To the west, the Brittany coast shimmered hazily on the horizon, Cancale and the Pointe du Grouin beckoning from across the Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel. And south, the path jinked into the greenery and my final destination remained bashfully veiled by the headland.

{ Gazing down from the eyrie, I saw the beach stretched out in an endless golden ribbon

Onward I ambled, the trail shaded by pines protecting the garden of a grand house; burbled laughter spilled out, recalling childhood days at seaside idylls. Blackthorns formed a safety barrier to the right, their twigs speckled with silk webs in which wiggled curious black-and-orange caterpillars, while to the left a meadow of daisy-flecked grass undulated away towards turreted houses. The air was melodious with birdsong: this area is home to the rare Dartford warbler, its slightly frantic trills emerging from heather and gorse.

Soon the trail left behind the neat domesticity of Carolles and took on a different character – wilder, more rugged, timeless. Descending among gorse, buttercups and brambles, the route ducked into patches of ivy-clad woodland, mostly stunted oaks and holly interspersed with bluebells. Down I plunged, into the steep-sided gorge of the River Lude, its sides seemingly too sheer to have been gouged by such a tame watercourse. Legend claims that the valley was hacked out by the sword of the archangel Michael during a battle with Satan; that hellish foe was wont to rest on the Rocher du Sard, a granite formation overlooking the gorge to the south, hence its nickname, the ➤





CLOCKWISE FROM FACING PAGE: Carolles-Plage, at the start of Paul's walk; The resort of Granville and its casino; The Christian Dior museum in Granville; The Falaises de Champeaux; Le Mont-Saint-Michel seen from the start of the walking trail at Le Bec d'Andaine; The Cabane Vauban lookout; The new bridge to Le Mont-Saint-Michel; **CENTRE:** The island of Tombelaine

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DIFFERENT
PACE

The best ways to see Le Mont-Saint-Michel

WALK ACROSS THE BAY

Take off your shoes, roll up your trouser legs and join a guide for the seven-kilometre walk across the bay from Le Bec d'Andaine at Genêts to Le Mont-Saint-Michel. The two-hour trek allows you to tackle the treacherous sands and currents much as the pilgrims of the past would have done, but with more detailed local knowledge to avoid the dangers. Walks range from simple there-and-back hikes (about 4.5 hours) to nocturnal or dawn excursions, and longer hikes with naturalist guides. From €5.50pp, depending on group size. Tel: (Fr) 2 33 89 80 88
www.cheminsdelabaie.com

TAKE THE BOAT

At higher tides, experienced kayakers can paddle across the bay to the island of Tombelaine, while beginners and families can take shorter trips alongside the beaches and cliffs, to see the landscape from a water-level perspective. From €25pp for a two to three-hour trip. Tel: (Fr) 6 08 77 04 37
www.seakayak-fr.com/?page=english

RIDE ON HORSEBACK

Explore the salt marshes, trot across towards the mount or – if you're an experienced rider – cross the bay via Tombelaine on horseback. From €280 for two days, two-hour beginners' ride €55, five-hour bay crossing €110. Tel: (Fr) 6 82 29 49 63
www.club-taniere.fr

SOAR ABOVE THE ABBEY

Get a bird's-eye view on a morning flight around the bay in a microlight or gyrocopter with instructor Régis Mao. See from on high how the mount has been transformed since the removal of the old causeway and the opening of the barrage, clearing sediment from around the island and pushing the salt marshes back from the base of the rock. Views of the sheep-grazed meadows and the bay are almost as spectacular as the abbey itself. Microlight/gyrocopter flights from €80/€90 for 20 minutes, starting from the aerodrome at Le Val-Saint-Père. Tel (Fr): 2 33 58 10 13
www.normandie-ulm.com

FLOAT OVER THE ISLAND

A dawn balloon flight is a magical way to experience the mount. Bretagne Montgolfières offers one-hour flights; take-off locations vary according to wind direction. From €260pp. Tel: (Fr) 6 64 52 09 20
www.bretagne-montgolfieres.fr

EXPLORE THE MOUNT IN DEPTH

A knowledgeable guide can provide a detailed commentary about the island abbey's rooms as well as revealing secrets of the crypts and cells, and running through the mount's 1,300-year history. Florence Rocaboy is an experienced guide with excellent English. Tel: (Fr) 6 10 07 28 29
Email: florence.rocaboy@laposte.net



STAY THE NIGHT

Come evening, once the crowds have departed, the island has a completely different character – wandering the Grande Rue becomes magical instead of manic. Hotels are expensive, and you're paying for location and atmosphere rather than exceptional quality; bay views usually command higher prices.

Le Logis Saint-Sébastien, housed in a 14th-century building on the Grande Rue, has some of the cheapest rates with its three simple but comfortable rooms. Triples from €90, breakfast €17 (tel: (Fr) 2 33 60 14 08, <http://en.logis-saint-sebastien.com>).

Auberge Saint-Pierre, also on the Grande Rue, has attractive rooms in a building with period features. Doubles from €217, breakfast €17 (tel: (Fr) 2 33 60 14 03, www.auberge-saint-pierre.fr).

The timing for most activities depends on the tides – the highest *grandes marées* occur just a few times a year. For tide tables, see www.ot-montsaintmichel.com/en/horaire-marees/mont-saint-michel.htm





ABOVE: The village of Saint-Jean-le-Thomas; **FACING PAGE:** Hot-air ballooners get a new perspective on Le Mont-Saint-Michel; **INSET:** Strolling along the Grande Rue

Chaise du Diable. (It's also called the Chapeau de Napoléon – and it does resemble the little Corsican's bicorne hat rather more than a seat.) Hidden among the cliffs, the tiny inlet long offered a haven for smugglers, and combating their trade was part of the *raison d'être* for the path.

Another stiff climb flanked by golden broom brought me up to the rock, where yet more dramatic views appeared. The surf pounded the rocks, which were themselves speckled with white seabirds. These cliffs represent an important stop-off for migratory birds; some half-million pause here to rest and refuel on their autumn odyssey south, and the Norman Ornithological Group sets up each year to count and band the avian travellers.

The birdwatchers base themselves at the Cabane Vauban, a few minutes' walk beyond the Rocher du Sard. This 18th-century granite hut was one of a string of lookouts along this coast ordered by the eponymous military engineer and acted as both a guard post and a relay point for signals between Le Mont-Saint-Michel and Granville. When the immediate military danger receded, it was used by coastguards watching for smugglers trying to sneak into the Port du Lude. Today it's a picturesque semi-ruin, but its slightly eerie charm was soon forgotten when I reached the top of the outcrop and took in the first unencumbered view south.

Rising from the bay ahead were two lumps. The first, topped with a verdant toupee of trees and scrub, was Tombelaine, a rocky, uninhabited island now designated a bird sanctuary to protect the egrets and peregrine falcons that nest there each spring. Beyond loomed an instantly recognisable shape: a wonky pyramid topped with a needle-sharp pinnacle tipped with a golden, glittering speck – Le Mont-Saint-Michel, with the gilded

sword of Saint Michael the Archangel. It was many kilometres distant, but I could imagine how the hearts of medieval pilgrims must have leapt at the sight. Those *miquelots* had already travelled far, risking bandits and rough Channel seas, so to catch a first glimpse of their destination would surely have been both a reassurance and a worry – knowing, as they did, the dangers of crossing the treacherous sands of the bay on foot.

The path dipped and climbed as the coast veered east, sometimes delving into patches of woodland, at others emerging

Figures crossed the sands and clambered around the rock to forage for shellfish

on to the cliffs, with more of the bay revealed at every turn. A kestrel hovered at my eye level, hungry eyes focused on the grassy scrub. Shapes bobbed in the waves below; I wanted them to be harbour seals, which hunt these waters, but they were just fishermen's buoys. A few walkers and the occasional jogger hailed a breathy "*bonjour*" as they passed, but in the main I was alone with the views. Soon the whole of the bay spread before me, miles of sand and dunes stretching to the double estuary where the Sée and the Sélune rivers merge and flow into the shallow waters.

Above the outcrop of Sol'Roc, I watched figures crossing the sands beneath me and clambering around the rock to forage for shellfish; according to season, this is a popular spot for oysters, cockles and clams. Indeed, the bay as a whole is a treat for seafood-lovers, who feast on oysters from Cancale, whelks ➤➤

from Granville, and lobster from the nearby Îles Chausey, France's own Channel Islands.

I kept my eyes up, though; somewhere around here, on the patch of cliffs known as the Falaises de Champeaux, was that lauded kilometre. It certainly couldn't hurt property prices, I thought, during my descent along a narrow footpath past another derelict coastguard *cabane*. Among the pine trees, where a cuckoo sang his unmistakable song, nestle cottages and villages, some thatched, all with glorious views over the sands to Le Mont-Saint-Michel – an estate agent's dream.

Eventually the path joins a road and descends to the sleepy little town of Saint-Jean-le-Thomas. It's a *bourg* of well-kept flower gardens and tidy villas, the kind of place where you're never out of earshot of a lawn being mown or a hedge being trimmed. It wasn't always so peaceful. The town's recorded history dates back to 917AD when these lands were donated to the abbey of Le Mont-Saint-Michel by the Norman duke William Longsword. In the 15th century it hosted an English bastion, while 400 years later it welcomed a less aggressive influx – of visitors drawn by the lure of the newly popular pastime of sea bathing. For a century it was a bustling resort – somewhat misleadingly called 'Petite Nice' – with a railway link to Paris.

The whole Cotentin coast enjoyed a holiday heyday during the 19th and early 20th centuries; in the far north, Le Landemer hotel attracted the likes of Claude Monet, Édith Piaf and Françoise Sagan, while the resorts of Granville – home to a Christian Dior museum – Barneville-Carteret and Agon-Coutainville had their days in the belle-époque sun.

General Dwight Eisenhower had his headquarters in Saint-Jean-le-Thomas for a few weeks from August 1944. Doubtless his mind was focused on the ongoing battle to drive the German army from Normandy after D-Day – but it seems he found time to enjoy the views from the cliffs.



ABOVE: The village church in Saint-Jean-le-Thomas

On this quiet Monday lunchtime, though, I slipped along the main street to the beach, where a wide sickle of sand curved away to the south, backed by marram-tufted dunes. A solitary little egret flapped languidly above the shallows to Tombelaine as I set out along the strand towards Genêts. A couple of hours' strolling brought me to Le Bec d'Andaine and the edge of the salt marshes that have gradually encroached on the bay, but which are now being repelled thanks to the project that has returned the mount to its original island state.

Here I would join a group and complete my pilgrimage across the sands to Le Mont-Saint-Michel, plunging knee-deep in quicksand and wading across the submerged rivers feeding the bay. But though the drama of that crossing is undeniable, it was the wild beauty of the clifftop walk that stayed with me. Which was the kilometre lauded by Herriot (or Eisenhower, or even Churchill, as some have said)? Clearly, I had covered it – but on a stretch so captivating, it was impossible to distinguish where the exceptional beauty began and where it ended. 🍷

Francofile *Explore the coastal path to Le Mont-Saint-Michel*

GETTING THERE

Paul travelled with Brittany Ferries on the overnight sailing from Portsmouth to Saint-Malo; from £172pp return for car plus two passengers, from £80 return for foot passengers (tel: 0871 244 1400, www.brittany-ferries.co.uk). See page 23 for other travel details.

GETTING AROUND

Carolles-Plage is about an hour's drive from Saint-Malo. Trains from the port serve Avranches and Granville (tel: 0844 848 5848, www.voyages-sncf.com). Buses run from Avranches to Granville via Genêts, Saint-Jean-le-Thomas, Champeaux and Carolles (Line 4, www.manche.fr). *Tour du Cotentin*

(TopoGuides GR, 2014) has detailed maps and route notes for the GR223. The 17km section between Carolles-Plage and Genêts takes about 4-5hr.

WHERE TO STAY

Château de Chantore

50530 Bacilly
Tel: (Fr) 6 74 30 66 64
www.chateaudechantore.com
This 18th-century chateau set in beautiful grounds (watch for red squirrels, deer and other wildlife) has been restored by hosts Bernard and Iñaki, and furnished with wonderful period pieces. Some suites have views of Le Mont-Saint-Michel. Doubles/suites from €165/€250 including breakfast.

FOR AN APÉRO

Le Jardin des Dunes
Plage du Pignolet
50530 Saint-Jean-le-Thomas
Tel (Fr): 2 33 68 28 20
Open Wed-Sun, Apr-Sept
(also Tues, July and Aug)
Enjoy a drink on the terrace of this café-restaurant and enjoy views of the beach and Le Mont-Saint-Michel.

WHERE TO EAT

La Grange de Tom
40 Route des Falaises
50530 Champeaux
Tel: (Fr) 2 33 61 85 52

www.la-grange-de-tom.fr
Homely restaurant with a terrace on the clifftop looking towards the mount. Unsurprisingly, fish and seafood are excellent. Three-course menus from €25.50, lunch from €13. Open every day in the summer, closed Tues evening and Wed out of season.



TOURIST INFORMATION: Normandy tourist board, tel: (Fr) 2 32 33 79 00, www.normandy-tourism.org; Le Mont-Saint-Michel tourist office, tel: (Fr) 2 33 60 14 30, www.ot-montsaintmichel.com

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Magical Morzine

After a five-year gap, **Carolyn Boyd** soon finds her ski legs on the pistes of this popular resort in Haute-Savoie





They say it's like riding a bike, but when you're standing at the top of a mountain about to embark on your first ski run in five years, skiing still seems pretty daunting. Yet sure enough, as the skis tip over the edge of the piste and the crunch of the icy snow gives way to powder, it seems that I have got my ski legs back. And it's wonderful.

I'm here in Morzine in the French Alps just after Christmas, the perfect way to prolong the festive feeling, gastronomic treats and all. Twinkling lights still hang in the streets and, by day, the sky is bright blue, the air bracing. My accommodation is the wonderful Ferme du Lac Vert in nearby Montriond, a stylish chalet that I had first encountered on a visit in 2008, at its very conception.

From the window of a minibus en route from the slopes to the chalet in which I had met Rob and Lucy Mundell, I had peered through a blizzard at a crumbling 19th-century farmhouse which, they told me, had 'great potential'. In the intervening years – when my ski jacket sat gathering dust – Rob and Lucy were turning this shell into a stylish retreat named after the nearby emerald lake.

{ Twinkling lights hang in the street and by day the sky is bright blue }

We had kept in touch – I was fascinated at how this story would pan out – and through emails and Facebook I watched with glee while they transformed this ancient building into an inviting, cosy chalet with bags of individual character. While Rob took care of the structure, Lucy was busy sourcing antique and vintage furniture, and bringing her distinctive vision to the place, with quirky ideas such as papier mâché cow heads, upholstering bedheads in Swiss Army blankets and commissioning a local artist to create an impressive staircase.

From the pictures, the result looked amazing, and so after five years of invitations (my two babies ➡)

LEFT: Le Pléney ski lift linking Morzine and Les Gets;

ABOVE: La Ferme du Lac Vert chalet, where Carolyn stayed

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATHIEU VITRE/OT DE MORZINE; LUCY MUNDELL



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The bridge over the valley to the Supermorzine ski lift, Morzine; One of the distinctive rooms at La Ferme du Lac Vert; The cheese bar at La Chamade restaurant; **BELOW:** The striking staircase at the Ferme du Lac Vert chalet

conspiring to keep me away from the ski slopes), I jumped on a plane and came over. And I am very glad I did. The place is cosy, quirky and adorable, as the photos promised it would be, and when you're there, sitting in front of the roaring fire enjoying the pre-dinner cocktail of the day, it's as if the chalet were giving you a gigantic hug. With a hot tub, massages on demand and amazing evening menus created by their talented chef Sharif 'Chiefy' Gergis (who reached the quarter-finals of BBC TV's *MasterChef* in 2006), it's a wonder that I can tear myself away to actually do what I'm here to do: ski.

To help me back in the swing of things, I have booked a lesson with a local instructor, Pierrot, who meets me at the ski lift and helps me to negotiate the pre-piste palaver of carrying one's skis and poles and walking in clumpy boots into the cable car. The bulky clothes and inflexible gloves feel unfamiliar as I shuffle around and finally get comfortable.

Then I look out of the window. As the cable car whisks us up the mountain I gaze out to the snow-covered peaks that stretch as far as the eye can see, the buzzing town below becomes a model village in the distance, and the empty slopes are peppered with skiers and snowboarders making



their descent. With the sun shining, I breathe in the cool, pure air and sigh. It's great to be back in the mountains.

Morzine is part of the Portes du Soleil ski area in Haute-Savoie and is linked by lifts to Avoriaz, a smaller ski-in, ski-out resort on the mountain top. Horse-drawn sleighs dash about at the foot of the high-rise apartments, bells jingling as they go, and we transfer briefly to a chairlift to climb ever higher and into the snowier areas. And then I'm at the top of the slope, embarking on my first ski run in five years; muscles tense, knuckles white. It's thrilling and nerve-wracking in equal measure.

As I do a series of gentle turns, I find that the adage is indeed true; it is like riding a bike. With Pierrot there to guide me towards the next lift, we go up, ski across, down and up again. An hour later, he points to a peak in the distance. "That's the Mur Suisse," he says. "From there you can ski into Switzerland." It seems miles away, but before long, I'm standing there, looking down a very steep piste into another country. Thankfully, we're not descending it, but staying on French soil (or snow), bound for a café for a *chocolat chaud*. I have earned the calories on the adrenalin production alone.



PHOTOGRAPHS: SAM INGLIS/OT DE MORZINE; J.B. BIEUVILLE/OT DE MORZINE; LUCY MUNDELL; CAROLYN BOYD



The skiing, meanwhile, earns me calories that I am happy to gain back at dinner at the chalet. After a cosy cocktail around the fire, it's time to take a seat at the long communal table. Different hats hang all around us – everything from a fireman's to a gendarme's kepi – and act as the perfect ice-breaker. While my fellow guests and I were strangers on arrival, all it takes is one drink, the swapping around of the headwear and we're friends.

The chalet staff swoop in with everyone's starters – beautifully presented on slate boards, every dietary requirement catered to – and 'Chiefy' stands at the foot of the table presenting the first course: flame-grilled scallops, crispy pancetta and black sesame seeds and peas. The scallops melt in the mouth. An equally delicious main follows: maple-glazed duck breast, crispy leg and a sweetcorn cream, with winter vegetables. Each course is the perfect quantity, so there is room for dessert (which there often isn't after *raclette tartiflette fondue*): a Valrhona chocolate mousse that disappears almost as quickly as it arrives. The wine flows as easily as the conversation, and soon aching muscles drive everyone towards bed.

Next day, after I have had a change of pace with a morning's snowshoeing (see panel above), lunch is booked for the hottest table in town – La Chamade. This family-run business has evolved from a simple *crêperie* to an elegant restaurant. In 2013, Thierry Thorens, son of the original owners, took the brave step of changing focus completely, and now it is a gastronomic hotspot, offering cheese and wine tastings, chef's table sessions and relaxed but high-class dining.

What makes it even more special is that, as well as being a chef and cookbook author, Thierry is an artist. He fashions sculptures from metal, mostly industrial parts. Cogs, nuts and bolts become candlesticks and on the first floor of the restaurant, his artwork has taken over a wall – copper calligraphy is bolted on to other industrial parts. Elsewhere, a huge canvas portrait of a woman is

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

Snowshoeing in the Valley de la Manche

In anticipation of my ski legs being wobblier than they actually turned out to be, I booked a snowshoeing walk on day two to give some different muscles a work-out. The instructor was Véronique Fillon, a diminutive, sun-tanned local who led me and a small group of fellow snowshoers through the forest to Lac des Mines d'Or. In summer, this artificial lake in the Valley de la Manche makes a lovely picnic and fishing spot. On this day, of course, it was covered in snow, but no less appealing as a pit stop. After a heart-pumping walk through the trees, nature-spotting as we went, Véronique poured us each a shot of espresso from a Thermos flask, and we caught our breath.

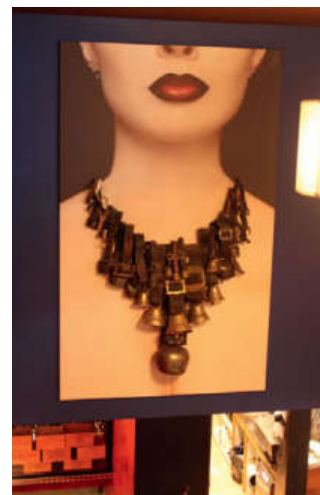
The walk back was downhill, and therefore easier, but on returning to Morzine just before lunch, my cheeks were even rosier than they had been on the ski slopes, and my heart had had an even bigger workout. Not so different from skiing, after all! (Véronique Fillon, Relief – La Montagne à l'Authentique, tel: (Fr) 4 50 38 09 21, mobile (Fr) 6 77 77 74 64, reliefmontagne@orange.fr).



adorned by a necklace created from dozens of real, leather-strapped cowbells. Thierry is keen to showcase other artists too, so he organises exhibitions in the basement throughout the year.

After an aperitif – a delicious adaptation of *kir royal* using sparkling wine and chestnut liqueur – I opt for the salmon with *reblochon* potatoes and a liquorice cream. It sounds a little odd, but is absolutely delicious and beautifully presented. The staff tell me about their renowned *Bar à Fromage*, a cheese-tasting hour that works perfectly for après-ski at 5pm. I'm torn – Chiefy's cuisine or the cheese. It's a tough one, but the chalet's open fire is too hard to resist. After an afternoon looking around the town, I return to the chalet for afternoon tea and cake, and later a glass of *vin chaud* in the bubbling hot tub. It's a hard job, this.

By day three, I'm itching to get back on the slopes. There are calories to burn and gastronomic treats to earn. Nicolas Evéquoz is the chalet's own ski guide, but a back injury has put him out of action for a few days, so Lucy is my ski pal. I feel slightly less tense than on the first day as we zip around the pistes, taking on the moderate and intermediate blue and red runs. ➡➡



ABOVE: A portrait by La Chamade chef Thierry Thorens using real-life cowbells hangs in the restaurant

The joy of skiing with a guide or someone who knows a resort well is that the piste map can stay safely in one's pocket – no battling a flapping piece of paper in a blizzard. The other perk is that those in the know can take you to the best watering holes. Lucy is keen to show me Chez BaBeth, a tiny restaurant behind the Pierre-Longue chairlift between Châtel and Avoriaz.

We squeeze through the narrow door, and it is like Santa's grotto, packed with fairy lights, Christmas decorations, faux-fur blankets and tartan curtains. Gingham tablecloths adorn the tables, which each occupy a cosy nook. Lucy orders *chocolats chauds* and tells me more about what has happened since they finished the chalet: the renovation of the *mazot* (the small adjoining house), a pop-up restaurant in the summer. "There are just so many outdoor activities in the summer: mountain biking, walking and the *via ferrata* (climbing routes)," she says. "The scenery is amazing and the lake is just stunning – so green. You should come back, you really should." Well OK then, you've twisted my arm.

Our final stop is for a late lunch at Le Vaffieu in Le Pléney, towards Les Gets, where we are meeting everyone from the chalet. Some have skied there, while injured Nicolas has brought the non-skiers on a snowmobile. We all bundle into the cosy upstairs room, which is decorated with charming wooden ornaments and knick-knacks.

We squeeze through the door, and the restaurant is like Santa's Grotto

The waitress brings a tray of sparkling wine and chestnut liqueur for everyone. Menus are bandied about, while ski jackets come off in a flurry of hats, gloves and scarves. The speciality is a huge *pot au feu*, a casserole full of steaming meat and veg, served with a bowl and ladle. We all tuck into our various meals, sharing stories of ski adventures, near and far. Amid a cheer, the guests raise a toast to our hosts Lucy and Nicolas, and before long we are ordering the Irish coffees and *digestifs*.

When we finally come back downstairs, the restaurant is empty and the sun is sinking behind the mountains. The ski lifts are grinding to a halt and we have to make it down before the light goes. It is the toughest test of my ski legs, as areas have started to freeze in the falling temperature. But despite the challenge of icy snow and bare patches, the skiing is a joy and on reaching the base of the mountain I'm proud of myself. Just two falls and ski confidence regained. Will it be another five years before I book my next ski trip? Five minutes, more like. 🐾



Francofile

Hit the Alpine slopes in the resort of Morzine

GETTING THERE

By air: Morzine is a 75-minute transfer from Geneva Airport, which is served by a number of airlines (see page 23 for details). There are many transfer services to the resort; we used Skiidy Gonzales (tel: (Fr) 4 50 37 36 85, www.skiidygonzales.com) whose reps can be recognised by their sombreros. Transfers cost from €40pp.

By road/ferry: Morzine is about an 8hr drive from Calais.

By rail: The nearest station is Cluses on the TER line from Annemasse to Saint-Gervais-les-Bains.

WHERE TO STAY

La Ferme du Lac Vert

169 Vieille Route

Montriond, 74110 Morzine

UK office tel: 01483 890 044

Chalet tel: (Fr) 4 50 79 49 33

www.skizeen.com

The chalet has 11 en-suite rooms and a family apartment. Stays cost from £895pp for a week and £580 for a short break, including cooked breakfast, afternoon tea and three-course evening meals, and minibus transfers to the ski lifts. Massages can be arranged or booked in advance with Nicole Coryton and cost from €30 (tel: (Fr) 6 04 49 42 32, www.mobilemountainmassage.com).



FOR AN APÉRO

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Chalets de Plaine Dranse

74390 Châtel

Tel: (Fr) 4 50 73 38 77

www.vieuxchalet.com

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WHERE TO EAT

La Chamade

90 Route de la Plagne

La Crusaz, 74110 Morzine

Tel: (Fr) 4 50 79 13 91

www.lachamade.com

Thierry Thorens's restaurant, cheese and wine bar. Main dishes from €22.

La Chaudanne

590 Route de la Plagne

74100 Morzine

Tel: (Fr) 4 50 79 12 68

www.lachaudanne-morzine.com

Popular traditional Savoyard restaurant, menus from €18.50.

Le Vaffieu

Le Pléney

74260 Les Gets

Tel: (Fr) 4 50 79 09 43

Mountain restaurant (pictured above) between Morzine and Les Gets.



TOURIST INFORMATION: Morzine tourist office, tel: (Fr) 4 50 74 72 72, www.morzine-avoriaz.com; An adult ski pass for the Portes du Soleil area in the 2015/16 winter season costs €49.50 for one day and €247.50 for six days. For the Morzine-Les Gets area only, the pass costs €38 for one day and €191 for six days.

PHOTOGRAPH: CAROLYN BOYD



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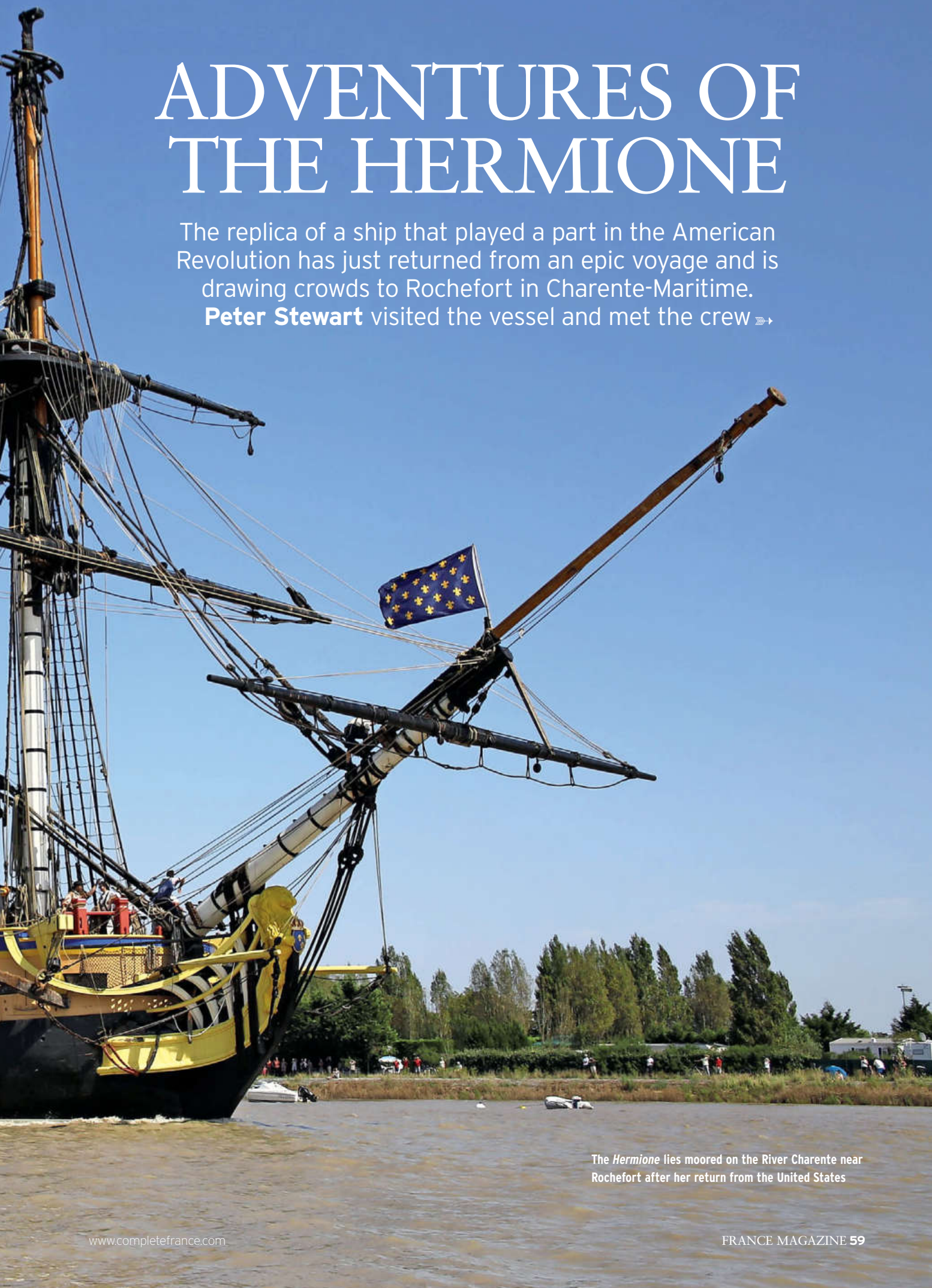


PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON DAVID / PHOTO ASSOCIATION HERMIONEL AFAYETTE

ADVENTURES OF THE HERMIONE

The replica of a ship that played a part in the American Revolution has just returned from an epic voyage and is drawing crowds to Rochefort in Charente-Maritime.

Peter Stewart visited the vessel and met the crew ➞



The *Hermione* lies moored on the River Charente near Rochefort after her return from the United States



Our dinghy sped out of the tiny port of Île d'Aix at the mouth of the River Charente, whipping up the salty sea-spray as it bounced across the tops of the waves. As the boat negotiated a sharp turn and ventured out into the wide blue yonder the star attraction that we had been longing to see came into sharp focus on the horizon. Her name was the *Hermione*, a 47-metre-high, 65-metre-long replica of the three-masted frigate that left these waters in 1780, taking the young Marquis de Lafayette to America where he would help George Washington to defeat the British in the War of Independence. Our tiny boat passed through a flotilla of other vessels busying around the *Hermione*, all vying to catch the best view of her; and after clambering up the well-worn rope ladder dangling precariously overhead, we were all safely on deck.

"Welcome on board this most special of ships," said the ship's superintendent, Bruno Gravellier, dressed in full naval uniform. "After almost two decades in the making we've finally done it," he said proudly.

The idea of building the replica was conceived in 1993 at a meeting attended by French author Erik Orsenna and Benedict Donnelly, founder of the Association Hermione-Lafayette in France, and a few others belonging to the Centre International de la Mer in Rochefort. They agreed unanimously that Lafayette's pivotal role in procuring French money, men and arms to assist Washington was an important part of both the US and France's collective memory, one which had been largely forgotten in recent times.

Construction began in 1997 and took 17 years, compared with just under a year for the original. It was a huge and costly undertaking, made possible with money raised by the Association Hermione-Lafayette and contributions from the Charente-Maritime *département* and the Région Poitou-Charentes. However, the single biggest contributor was the

public, with 64 per cent of the cost funded by the four million visitors to the project since its launch.

The *Hermione* was built just up river from Île d'Aix at the port of Rochefort. Traditional shipbuilding methods were used wherever possible, with carpenters, blacksmiths, riggers and sail makers rallying to make the ship what she is today. About 2,000 French oak trees were sourced to create 400,000 hand-sculpted pieces for the hull while 24 kilometres of ropes, many of which were prepared at the nearby Corderie Royale rope-making museum, went in to the rigging. However, even a historical project cannot avoid modern rules and regulations. The *Hermione* had to make several concessions in order to comply with international maritime safety regulations, which included having two motors, modern GPS navigational equipment and adequate sanitary living conditions for her crew.

About 2,000 French oak trees were sourced to create 400,000 hand-sculpted pieces for the hull

The *Hermione*'s crew was starting to intrigue me as I paused and glanced at a sea of fresh-faced recruits. "We are proud of the crew, most of whom are volunteers and have sacrificed their real life to be a part of the history of this vessel," said Gravellier. Previous sailing experience was not a prerequisite for the Atlantic voyage; in fact, some of the 73-strong crew had never even boarded a ship before. Teamwork was the most important criterion and crew members were trained for a year in old-world sailing practices, which included climbing the rigging and manoeuvring the sails by hand. American volunteer Marc Jensen said: "It was physically

PHOTOGRAPHS: VALÉRIE TOBAT/ASSOCIATION HERMIONE-LAFAYETTE SIMON DAVID/CARO; DAVID COMPAIN/VILLE DE ROCHEFORT; ASSOCIATION HERMIONE-LAFAYETTE



challenging at times, but we all quickly took on the rhythm of ship life, and the friendships I developed will last a lifetime.”

Lying proudly in the dry dock, the *Hermione* is enjoying a well-earned rest following her epic voyage across the Atlantic and up the eastern seaboard of the United States. “The Americans loved her and were very thankful for her being built,” Gravellier said. The *Hermione* began her maiden voyage on 18 April and – after stops in the Canary Islands and the Caribbean – made landfall on 5 June in Yorktown, Virginia, more than 6,000 kilometres away. The Friends of Hermione-Lafayette in America sponsored the United States tour which members saw as a reaffirmation of the historic bond shared between the US and France. “A lot of Americans know the name Lafayette but few know who he really was and it was great for us to remind them of the significance,” said Gravellier.

Lafayette first ventured to America in 1777 in secret to meet Washington and pledge his assistance, but it was not until 1779 that French intervention in the war was formally approved by Louis XVI. The *Hermione* was assigned to take Lafayette to Boston and departed from the Île d’Aix on 21 March, 1780. ➡

FROM FACING PAGE, TOP LEFT: The *Hermione* arrives in Boston during her east coast tour of the USA; Games in the park of the Corderie Royale at the homecoming in Rochefort; Crowds watch the *Hermione* enter the dockyard; The replica ship shows her firepower on the River Charente; The *Hermione* during her voyage across the Atlantic

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

Learn the ropes in this naval town

Rochefort’s compact, grid-like layout is due to the military planning that went into its construction in the 17th century; it makes the naval town relatively easy to explore on foot and it is home to a fascinating cluster of museums.

Begin a walking tour at the Corderie Royale in Rue Jean-Baptiste Audebert. Once the centre for rope-making and Europe’s longest building, it now houses the Centre International de la Mer (tel: (Fr) 5 46 87 01 90, www.corderie-royale.com), a museum dedicated to the town’s seafaring past. You’ll learn about the types of ropes used on French ships and get a chance to make your own.

A quick stroll across Place de la Gallaissière will bring you to the Musée de la Marine (tel: (Fr) 5 46 99 86 57, www.musee-marine.fr/rochefort). Displays over several floors feature large model ships and other artefacts demonstrating the town’s maritime heritage. Climb to the top floor and you’ll be rewarded with a picture-postcard view of the *Hermione*.

One of Rochefort’s most celebrated residents was the naval officer and novelist Pierre Loti. Objects that he collected on his travels are on show at the Musée Hèbre de Saint Clément in Avenue Charles de Gaulle (tel: (Fr) 5 46 82 91 60, www.ville-rochefort.fr/culture/equipement/hebre). It also has a 3D virtual tour of his nearby home, which is currently shut for refurbishment.



Yorktown was one of several ports selected for the replica's east-coast tour due to their strategic importance in the War of Independence. It was here that the original *Hermione* took part in the naval blockade in 1781 which led to the surrender of the British General Lord Cornwallis and his troops.

The replica received a warm welcome at an official ceremony and stayed in Yorktown for three days. Visitors were allowed on board for free and chatted to the crew on their experiences before venturing below deck. They could also view a travelling photography exhibition showing the 17 years of construction.

On 8 June, the frigate journeyed north to Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation home. In keeping with the original *Hermione*, the replica transported a crate of cognac, traditional tippie of Poitou-Charentes, which was offloaded and auctioned for charity. After stops in Annapolis and Baltimore the ship called into Philadelphia, where she joined a tall ships festival. Historical re-enactments took place and there was a re-creation of the meal that Washington, Lafayette and delegates of the Continental Congress enjoyed on board the *Hermione* in 1781.

But the crowning moment for superintendent Gravelier came when the replica arrived in New York – capital of the United States from 1785 to 1790 – for American Independence Day, 4 July. The replica was met with jubilation, and a flotilla of around 140 ships joined her at the Statue of Liberty for a welcome parade. "The turnout was simply incredible – I've never seen so many ships," he recalled with a twinkle in his eye.

Following a sensational 4 July fireworks display the *Hermione* left port the next morning bound for Boston in Massachusetts, the arrival point for Lafayette on 28 April 1780, where more historical re-enactments were held. The east coast tour ended in Canadian waters, in the port town of Lunenburg in Nova Scotia on 18 July. Here the ship enjoyed a short pause before returning across the Atlantic, a journey which, according to Gravelier, "was much better than in Lafayette's day as he returned in deepest, darkest winter."

So what is next for the *Hermione*? The ship came full circle the day after our visit aboard, showing her might by firing 12-pounders from her 34 cannons as she sailed up the River Charente and pulled into the Rochefort dockyard where she came to life all those years ago. The ship is now open to the public, who can also visit a fascinating temporary exhibition which chronicles every stage of the construction process. The *Hermione* won't be here forever, though; "She'll go wherever she is requested," Gravelier assures me. In fact, she is already scheduled to sail to Brest for the Breton port's international maritime festival next July. But for now she'll sit happily in Rochefort as visitors come to marvel at her and celebrate an alliance that has endured for more than 200 years. 🍷



FROM LEFT: Crowds meet the *Hermione* in Philadelphia; Dancers in period costume during the celebration in Rochefort

Francofile

Discover more about the *Hermione*'s home town



GETTING THERE

By rail: Peter travelled from London to La Rochelle via Paris courtesy of Voyages-sncf.com (tel: 0844 848 5848, www.voyages-sncf.com, returns from £129). See page 23 for more travel details.

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel de la Corderie Royale
Rue Audebert
17300 Rochefort
Tel: (Fr) 5 46 99 35 35
www.corderieroyale.com
Luxurious hotel set in a 17th-century property overlooking the Corderie Royale rope-making museum and park. Doubles from €91.

FOR AN APÉRO

Garden ice café
27 Rue Audry de Puyravault
17300 Rochefort
Tel: (Fr) 5 46 99 00 89
www.gardenicecafe.com
Café-bar just off one of the town's main shopping streets with ample seating inside and out, and a wide range of drinks including cocktails made with the local fortified wine Pineau des Charentes.

WHERE TO EAT

Cap Nell
1 Quai Joseph Bellot
17300 Rochefort
Tel: (Fr) 5 46 87 31 77
www.capnell.com
A restaurant overlooking the marina, offering a friendly service and delicious seafood dishes such as scallops adorned with mango chutney and lemon crumble. Dinner reservations are advisable. Menus from €22.30.
Eat out in Charente-Maritime – see page 82.

VISIT HERMIONE

Association Hermione-Lafayette
Arsenal Maritime
Place Amiral Dupont
BP 70177 – 17308 Rochefort Cedex
Tel: (Fr) 5 46 82 07 07
www.hermione.com
Explore the *Hermione* above and below deck, either by yourself or as part of a guided tour. Visits 10am-12.30pm and 2pm-6pm (until 3 Jan 2016; 2016 times TBC). Guided visits last 1hr 15min and cost €16 (€6 children). Unguided visits €9 (€6 children).



TOURIST INFORMATION: Rochefort Océan tourist office, tel (Fr) 5 46 99 08 60, www.rochefort-ocean.com; Poitou-Charentes tourist board, tel: (Fr) 5 49 55 77 00, www.visit-poitou-charentes.com

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GALLIC FLAIR IN PARADISE

Travel halfway around the globe and you can still be in France, as **Ray Kershaw** discovers on a trip to La Nouvelle-Calédonie

Into our drowsy post-lunch languor drifts the lilt of an accordion. It is a sizzling afternoon. Teams of panting poodles are towing silver-haired ladies; pétanque balls syncopate with a humming chorus of bees. Observed from under our parasol at Le Pandanus Café, it is like a *tableau vivant* of French provincial life. We know it is France – a chip off the old *Hexagone* – yet every day we are still surprised.

We are 17,000 kilometres from the Champs-Élysées, on the French islands of La Nouvelle-Calédonie. In Place des Cocotiers, the leafy hub of the capital Nouméa, coconut palms and olive trees are weaving their Provençal and South Pacific shade over classical French fountains and tribal totem poles. The indigenous Kanak women's multi-coloured gowns outdazzle the brilliant tropical blooms.

La Nouvelle-Calédonie – an exotic cocktail of age-old tribal customs and Parisian chic – is doing everything a South Seas

paradise should do. Although it's double billed as the Land of Eternal Spring and the Heart of the Pacific, the islanders themselves, with affectionate modesty, simply call it *Le Caillou* (The Pebble). But what a pebble!

The main island of Grande Terre, which lies inside a coral reef rivalling that of Australia's, is more than twice the size of Corsica and girdled by the world's biggest lagoon. Captain James Cook came across the islands in 1774 and named it New Caledonia because the landscape reminded him of the Scottish Highlands. However, impenetrable jungles deterred other outsiders for another 70 years. In 1843, a British merchant, James Paddon, paid Stone Age tribes a metal axe for the Nou peninsula and built a thriving port. Ten years later, France annexed the island, but the indigenous Kanaks, warriors to a man, kept severing French heads. Paddon accepted 40,000 gold francs for his thriving fortified settlement.

PHOTOGRAPHS: FRANK GUZOU/HEMIS FR; ALICE KERSHAW;
CAMILLE MORENO/HEMIS FR



MAIN PICTURE: The Koulnoué Village Resort at Hienghène on the north-east coast; TOP: The dramatic setting of the capital Nouméa; ABOVE: The clear waters of the Grand Reef off Nouméa

Traces of Nouméa's British infancy survive but, gilded with Gallic charm and style as it grew, the sun-drenched capital in miniature steals our hearts on the first day. Wherever we wander in the old town we find ourselves back at the tropical gardens in Place des Cocotiers. The surrounding colonial-style buildings provide a potpourri of haute couture Paris and South Seas animation. Restaurants represent the *Hexagone's* six corners. Grottos of Swiss watches rub shoulders with trinket shops. We find *boulangeries*, *chocolatiers* and elegant *épiceries* displaying island-grown vanilla and foie gras from Périgord. A cut-price Kanak gown? A Dior? A Givenchy? You'll find them all here. Nickel mines made it France's richest colony. Incomes top those in metropolitan France by 20 per cent.

From the beginning there were Kanak revolts, but the seismic change occurred in 1942 when La Nouvelle-Calédonie became the USA's headquarters during the Pacific War. A million

soldiers passed through. There were cinemas, theatres, big bands and bebop; hospitals, airfields and South-Pacific-style romances. As in World War I, when 1,200 Kanaks fought at Verdun, everyone pitched in. The story is told in Nouméa's War Museum. Colonial rule could never be the same again.

France raised the islands' status to Overseas Territory in 1946. Now Kanaks too were *citoyens*, yet many wanted independence: a nation called Kanaky. After violent unrest, President François Mitterrand allowed a referendum in 1987. Europeans voted for France; Kanaks stayed at home. Under the slogan 'Two Colours, One People', Grande Terre was divided: the south and Nouméa, where 75 per cent of the 260,000 inhabitants live, and the thinly populated tribal north.

In any referendum two white tribes have a permanent majority. The Caldoches, the aristocracy, descend from early colonists. The Zoreilles (Créole for ears) are later French ➡



arrivals. But many Kanaks, too, privately prize French nationality. They like the first-class hospitals, social security, TV with *le football* and films from *la Métropole*. They like croissants, Roquefort cheese and fine bordeaux wines, but best of all they like *français*. The 300 tribes, who were once blood enemies, speak 29 languages with countless variations. Their lingua franca French seems their only superglue.

At the quayside market where we start every day, Caldoches, Zoreilles and Kanaks mingle in cosmopolitan harmony. We get advice on preparing papayas, breadfruit and yams. The greengrocery pavilions overflow with fruit and vegetables. There is grass-ranged beef from the west coast savannahs; venison and boar from the mountain forests. But it is the glittering harvests of the reef, a Unesco World Heritage site, that leaves us breathless but bewildered with its embarrassment of riches.

Whatever our catch, which is often mahi-mahi, the islands' prime fish, we make time for an early coffee at Le Bout du Monde brasserie. The armada of white boats in the Port Moselle marina is dazzling in the sunshine. Six bays ring Nouméa like a diadem. The islets spangling the lagoon look like the one-man desert islands dreamt up by cartoonists on gloomy London days. Deserted, they're not. Windsurfers dart between speeding water taxis ferrying divers to submarine wonderlands.

We devour our mahi-mahi *sauce vanille* – a Nouméa speciality – on the ballroom-sized balcony of our skyscraper apartment



while the Baie des Citrons' *vie française* unfolds along palm-shaded promenades and garden-hemmed beaches that the Côte d'Azur would envy. Window shoppers ogle boutiques between the seafront-restaurant terraces of the Baie de l'Anse Vata.

We try to resist (but frequently fail) the temptations of master *pâtissiers* – refugees from *la Métropole* pursuing endless summer. Our favourite ice-cream seller, Jean Claude, came as a soldier and never went back. His golden cart is an esplanade landmark. "Why would you leave paradise?" It is a word that we hear a lot, both from Kanaks and Gauls.

There is a cruise ship pamphlet, *How to Spend Your Two Hours in New Caledonia*. Two months, or even two years, might not be enough. Nouméa, Kanaks tell us, is merely an hors d'oeuvre for banquets ahead. Our 400-kilometre odyssey north will lead us through the fabled land of Hoot Ma Whaap and conclude at *le Véritable Bout du Monde*. Who would not have itchy feet?

First we visit the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, named after an assassinated independence leader. The architectural tour de force, created by Rezo Piano, co-designer of the

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: This sign in Nouméa would not be out of place in Paris; The Tjibaou Cultural Centre; Pupils have outdoor lessons in Puébo, near Balade; Kanak women playing cricket near Koné; Ice-cream seller Jean-Claude Wittmann; The Baie des Tortues on the west coast; **FACING PAGE, BELOW:** The cagou, national bird of La Nouvelle-Calédonie



Pompidou Centre in Paris, celebrates Kanak heritage and customs: essential keys for understanding a very different world.

The west-coast highway speeds between mountains and lagoons. Roads are as good as *la Métropole's* but with far fewer cars. The west is mixed Kanak and settler country. The villages look so sprucely French that they could be airbrushed *Plus Beaux Villages*. From the *mairies* the rainbow flags of Kanaky fly alongside *drapeaux tricolores*.

As we zigzag east across the central mountain chain, river gorges, lakes and peaks merge mesmerically into an emerald montage. The tropical forests seem without end. Hundreds of bird species, many endemic, include the cagou, the strange-looking flightless bird that has become La Nouvelle-Calédonie's symbol. Of myriad plant and wild flower varieties, 2,500 grow only here. Butterflies abound. Giant tree-climbing lizards top the reptile hierarchy; in this slice of Eden none is venomous.

When we meet pedestrians or the rare oncoming car, everybody waves. Kanaks live and die by *la coutume* – age-old traditions vital to respect. When we photograph a cemetery, fragrant with flowers, we get sharply reprimanded: the only hostility we ever incur. These are hallowed places. Yet after explanations, we are waved off with a smile. Before entering a *tribu* – an individual tribe's territory – you request the chief's permission, offering a gift: *un petit geste coutumier*.

Ask permission to take pictures and Kanak women become starlets auditioning for Hollywood. While they preserve

traditional usages such as symbolic seashell money, women especially love their laptops, smartphones and driving 4x4s. Perhaps their most endearing trait is a passion for cricket. A mystery to Gauls, the sport was introduced to the Kanaks by British missionaries. Today the women rule. We watch the Baco tribe beat Koumac by an innings. In ankle-length gowns, the 13-player teams use home-made bats and balls with panache. Kanak shops sell everything imaginable from missionary dresses (the English word is used) to Normandy butter, Beaujolais and croissants. Children having lessons under a tree ask where we're from and shyly try some English.

The east-coast corniche, skipping high and low between flashes of ocean, is a rollercoaster mixing white-knuckle thrills with spellbinding views. We are in the heart of Hoot Ma Whaap – the mountains and bays of Cook's New Caledonia. We swim in rock basins under waterfalls tumbling 200 metres and in crystalline coves where limpid rivers meet the sea. The wide River Ouaième has a cable-hauled ferry; the underworked ferryman often naps between cars.

Hienghène's hidden lagoon, lapping the Lindéralique Crag, seems too idyllic to be true. It is depicted on banknotes so we expect other tourists, yet we could be the last people on Earth. We stay at the Koulnoué Village Resort, a picture-book epitome of our coral island dream, sited in a Kanak tribal area. Our luxurious grass hut borders a luminous, shell-strewn beach. There are swimming pools, tennis, riding and boating. Kanak chefs regale us with French and local dishes. The Koulnoué tribe staff make us feel Koulnoués too.

We swim in rock basins under waterfalls and in coves where limpid rivers meet the sea

One reason for our coming here is to sample the new *Grande Randonnée* track that will traverse the island. From the Tiwaé tribal area, the trail takes us steeply through forests that few but the Kanaks have trodden since the beginning of recorded time. We ford cascading streams; strange bird cries make us start. The hotel pool and Pernods soon feel centuries away. Each ridge, each step, each corner seem to draw us deeper into the island's past.

From a rocky summit clearing we suddenly see both coasts. Three trees bear strange carved symbols; empty-eyed cattle skulls squint down from boughs. Kanaks are Christians but here their older gods cling on. Just 100 years ago anyone found trespassing would have been ritually consumed. We have not met a soul all day and yet it feels as if someone is watching us. My wife Alice wants to be off. It seems a sound idea.

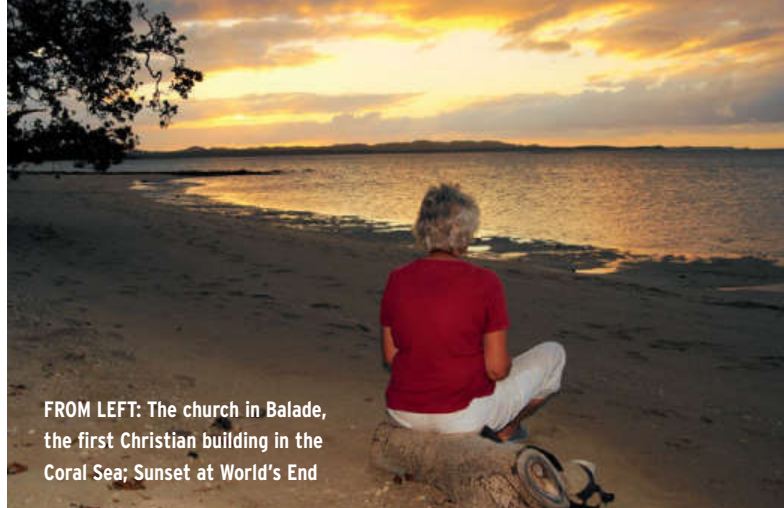
We reach Balade, a hamlet on the north-east coast that is momentous in the annals of South Seas exploration as the site of Captain Cook's landing. Its snow-white church was the first Christian edifice in the Coral Sea, which stretches from Australia to the Solomon Islands. Here, in 1853, France claimed the island. In 2011, on the same spot, Kanaks claimed it back symbolically. We picnic at Cook's Bay – as pristine and empty as on the day he stepped ashore. ➡➡



Le Bout – le Bout du Monde – is what everyone calls Grande Terre's final northern thrust. Roaming cattle and wild horses graze ochre-coloured mountains. People are few. There is no farther you can go.

After 30 kilometres of bumpy, dusty, nerve-testing road, wondering what we're doing here, we descend into a plausible vision of heaven. Before an endless palm-fringed beach seven bamboo bungalows offer rustic South Seas versions of every five-star comfort: bougainvillea-hung verandahs, giant conch shell washbowls, solar-powered showers roofed with blue sky. No footprints mark the sand. It seems the Land that Time Forgot.

The auberge at the World's End, the Relais de Poingam, is self-sufficient. We settle for whatever the chef can drum up: lagoon-caught lobster, spit-roasted suckling pig, tropical fruit and everything green from the *jardin potager*. *La Métropole*



FROM LEFT: The church in Balade, the first Christian building in the Coral Sea; Sunset at World's End

wines seem the only immigrants. Even the *fleur de sel* comes from the auberge's own *salines*. Replete with desserts such as calvados-flamed banana crème brûlée, in the tropical darkness we lounge on our verandah and hear the vast Pacific Ocean purl on the beach. With no ambient light, the southern constellations glint like diamonds in the sky.

We actually made it. The World's End, of course, should not be easy to reach but it is – like La Nouvelle-Calédonie itself – so much harder to leave. 🌊

Francofile *Discover the paradise of La Nouvelle-Calédonie*

GETTING THERE

By air: Air France flies daily from London and Manchester via Paris and Osaka, from £1,598 return (tel: 0871 663 377, www.airfrance.co.uk). Flying times from 20 to 27 hours. As an Australia add-on, regional airline Aircalin flies daily from Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, from around £400 return (tel: (Fr) 8 26 62 13 20, www.aircalin.com).

GETTING AROUND

Nouméa's buses are excellent. Small hire cars cost around £32 a day; all the big names are represented. For walkers, the new long-distance footpath will eventually extend for 400 kilometres (www.randomnees.tourismeprovincenord.nc); maps are available (www.ign.fr). The satellite Loyalty Islands of Ouvéa, Lifou and Maré make unforgettable excursions. Aircalin has daily flights, four-flight passes from £178.

WHEN TO GO

High season for French tourists is Oct-Dec. May-Sept is less crowded and not so hot. Jan-Apr is the wet season, when hurricanes can strike.

ISLAND FACTS

Island time is GMT + 11 hours. Currency is the Pacific franc (CPF), 150 = £1. The island is malaria-free but tropical dengue fever is reported in the wet season. Medical standards equal those of mainland France. EU citizens are covered by the EHIC card. International dialling code is 687.

READING

Vanuatu & New Caledonia (Lonely Planet) is the sole English-language guidebook. The French *Guide Évasion*

Nouvelle-Calédonie (Hachette) is available online.

IN NOUMÉA WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Beurivage
98845 Nouméa
7 Promenade Roger-Laroque
Tel: (NC) 26 20 55
www.grands-hotels.nc
Old-world charm at the Baie des Citrons' best-placed hotel. Doubles from £89.

Casa del Sole
10 Route de l'Aquarium
98846 Nouméa
Tel: (NC) 25 87 00
www.casadelsole.nc
King-sized apartments with enormous balconies overlooking the Baie des Citrons and Baie de l'Anse Vata. Doubles from £100.

WHERE TO EAT

The Roof
134 Promenade Roger-Laroque
98800 Nouméa
Tel: (NC) 25 07 00
Watch sharks swim beneath you while tucking in to fusion fish dishes on a pier over the bay.

Au P'tit Café
8 Avenue Carcopino
98800 Nouméa
Tel: (NC) 28 21 89
www.aupitcafe.nc
Nouméa's current favourite, so book well ahead for dishes from land and sea. Mains from £15-£18.

FOR AN APÉRO
Brasserie le Bout du Monde
4 Rue de la Frégate Nivôse
98847 Nouméa



Tel: (NC) 27 77 28
www.leboutdumonde.noumea.com

Soak up the atmosphere on a colourful quayside. The brasserie also serves good-value meals.

IN THE NORTH WHERE TO STAY

Kouloué Village Resort
BP 63 Hienghène
Tel: (NC) 42 81 66
www.grands-hotels.nc
Luxurious beachside huts in a tropical park; half board £160 per night.

Relais de Poingam
Le Bout du Monde
98826 Pouv
Tel: (NC) 47 92 12
www.relais-poingam.nc
Bungalows for two £66; breakfast and dinner, including drinks, £30pp.

TOURIST INFORMATION: Southern Province Tourism, including Nouméa, www.destinationprovincesud.nc; or tel: (NC) 28 75 80, www.office-tourisme.nc; Northern Province Tourism, tel: (NC) 27 78 05, www.tourismeprovincenord.nc. To stay overnight with tribes contact the tourist offices in Hienghène, tel: (NC) 42 43 57, www.hienghene-tourisme.nc, or Touho, tel: (NC) 42 70 26, www.touho-tourisme.nc. Read the brochure *The Customary Gestures*, about tribal customs, before heading north.

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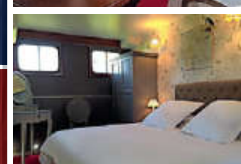


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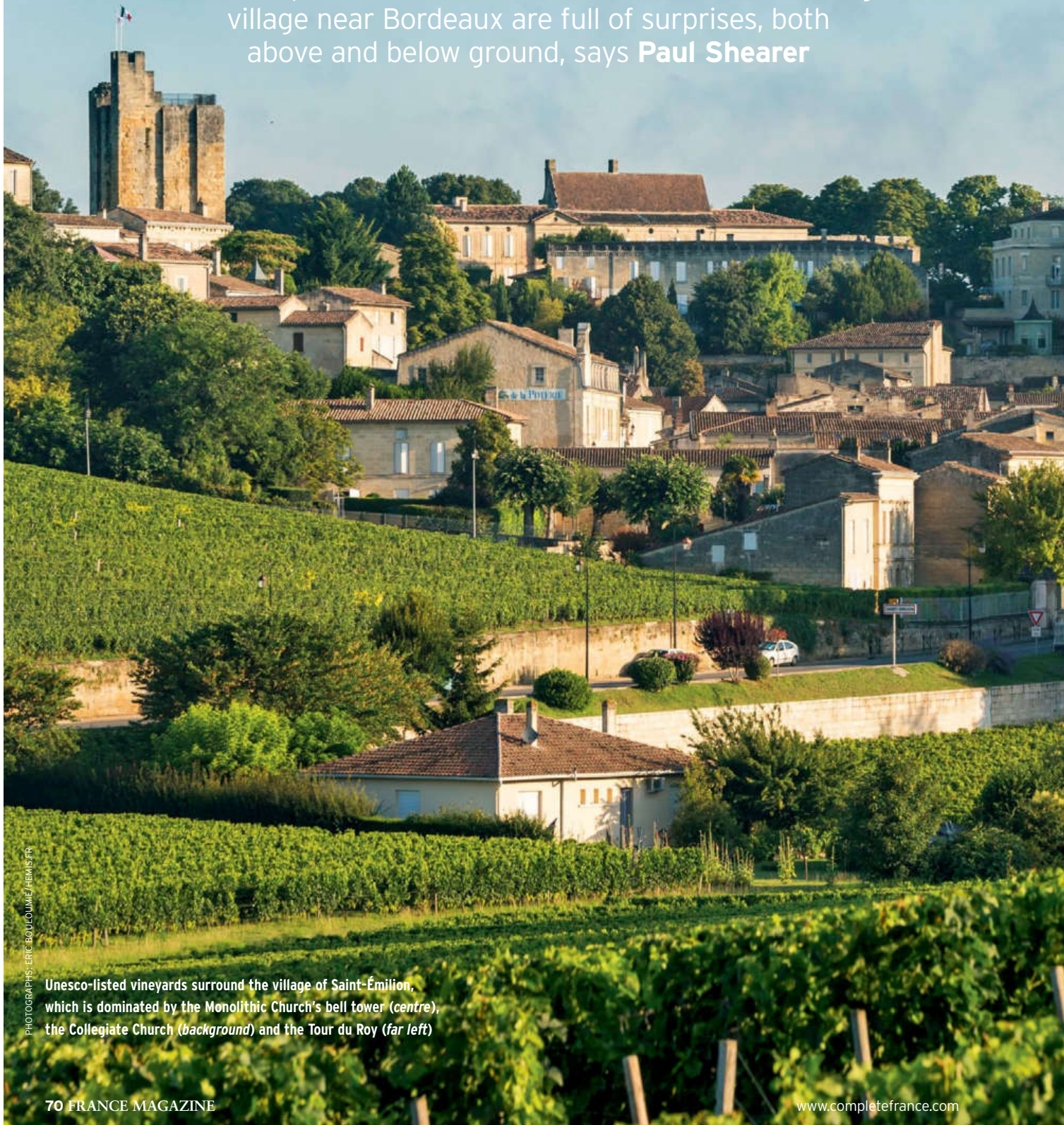
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Take a stroll in... Saint-Émilion

The steep, cobbled streets of this famous wine-making village near Bordeaux are full of surprises, both above and below ground, says **Paul Shearer**



PHOTOGRAPHS: ERIC BOULOUINIE/HEMISFR

Unesco-listed vineyards surround the village of Saint-Émilion, which is dominated by the Monolithic Church's bell tower (*centre*), the Collegiate Church (*background*) and the Tour du Roy (*far left*)



Wear comfortable shoes. That was the best piece of advice that I read before visiting Saint-Émilion. It feels wrong to burden this famous wine village with such mundane matters, but sensible footwear is the key to fully enjoying its attractions.

Saint-Émilion perches on a promontory 30 minutes' drive east of Bordeaux and overlooks the valley of the River Dordogne, which snakes west from here to join the River Garonne and the Gironde Estuary. When English ships came on medieval 'booze cruises' they brought cobblestones as ballast before returning with their precious liquid cargo. The cobbles, though pleasing to the eye, can be hard on the ankles as you wander the '*tertres*' (as the steep cobbled streets are called) past elegant limestone buildings.

It was almost 1,300 years ago that the Breton monk Émilion came to Ascumbas, as the community was then called. In the 17 years until his death in 767, he lived in a cave sleeping on his stone bed. His seat carved into the rockface is reputed to be an aid to women's fertility and the small spring-fed pool cures blindness, so legend has it.

Émilion's miracles attracted disciples, which led to the growth of a thriving monastic community and the naming ➤➤

RIGHT, CLOCKWISE: One of Saint-Émilion's typically sloping streets, leading up to the Le Tertre restaurant; Looking down on Place du Marché; The cloisters of the Collegiate Church

of the village after the sanctified monk. With a lucrative wine trade to England established under the Anglo-Gascon union in the 12th century, the foundations of the town were built. Quite literally. The limestone beneath the town became another great resource and around 200 kilometres of tunnels were quarried for precious stone blocks to build the softly pale buildings and many neighbouring châteaux.

The underground world of Saint-Émilion is part of a fascinating guided tour (there are overground tours too – see at the tourist office) which takes in the hermit's cave and another surprising treasure – Europe's largest monolithic church. It is a cathedral-sized space, carved out of the inside of a limestone cliff and overlooking the central marketplace. The church is an atmospheric cavern with remnants of 14th-century frescoes and carvings as well as modern structural bracing to support the 4,500-tonne, 53-metre-high bell tower.

The bell tower, which rises up from the corner of Place du Clocher, is the highest point in Saint-Émilion. Take the 200 steps to the top and you will enjoy great views of Place de l'Église Monolithe (aka Place du Marché) and across the rooftops to the remains of the ramparts and the vineyards beyond. For another panoramic view climb the Tour du Roy, the medieval keep of the king's castle.

Back at ground level, choose a street to amble along and you will soon be browsing shops, wine merchants, bars and restaurants that help to make this village such a popular tourist destination with plenty of historic buildings to enjoy – especially if you remembered your walking shoes. 🍷



SAINT-ÉMILION AT A GLANCE

Stay the night at... Le Palais Cardinal (tel: (Fr) 5 57 24 72 39, www.palais-cardinal.com), a 27-bedroom hotel housed in a medieval palace on Place du 11 Novembre 1918. Doubles from €107 with a luxury option at €180, breakfast €14. The restaurant (open May-Nov) serves delicious regional cuisine with menus from €30.

Stop for a coffee at... Bar de la Poste (tel: (Fr) 5 57 24 70 76, www.restaurant-st-emilion.fr), which has shaded tables overlooking Place du Marché. Easygoing service means that coffee can easily turn into snacking.

Stop for a wine at... Ô Trois Fontaines (tel: (Fr) 9 81 85 76 04) in Rue de la Porte Bouqueyre, which has a fine selection by the glass to accompany

brasserie-style grilled meat. Music and bar stools made from barrels give the place a modern feel, which can be refreshing after all that heritage.

Stop for lunch at... Le Tertre (tel: (Fr) 5 57 74 46 33, www.restaurant-le-tertre.com), a cosy restaurant tucked away on the steeply sloping Rue du Tertre de la Tente. The friendly owner serves traditional cuisine with a modern twist. Three-course lunch menu €25.



WHAT TO SEE

- The town's 17 historic monuments, 11 of which are listed, are a diverse group of religious, military and civil buildings in various states of repair. They include the Collegiate Church and its cloister, built between the 12th and 15th centuries with Romanesque and Gothic flourishes, and the Chapelle de la Trinité, which was built by Benedictine monks in the 13th century. It was used for a while as a barrel maker's workshop, creating a layer of soot that both hid and protected medieval frescoes which are now revealed in all their splendour.
- The Cordeliers cloister (pictured left) is a splendid remnant of a 14th-century Franciscan monastery and there are also underground cellars, where sparkling Crémant de Bordeaux is now produced. Take a tour and then enjoy a tasting in the tranquil gardens

PHOTOGRAPHS: OT SAINT-ÉMILION/ANNE LANTA/HEURISKO; PAUL SHEARER



ON THE WINE TRAIL

The vineyards surrounding Saint-Émilion are of such historical importance that in 1999 they became the first in the world to be given Unesco World Heritage status. What the Romans began, the monks developed. Coming under English rule through the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to the future Henry II, the town was given its freedom by King John in 1199. The royal charter led to the creation of the Jurade, a fraternity responsible for all things vinous in the town and the eight surrounding *communes*. Every September, members parade in their scarlet robes (*pictured above*) to announce the start of the harvest and release black balloons from the top of the Tour du Roy.

The area missed out on the Bordeaux classification of 1855 but has since created its own classification, divided into five main *appellations*: Saint-Émilion, Montagne Saint-Émilion, Lussac Saint-Émilion, Puisseguin Saint-Émilion and Saint-Georges Saint-Émilion. Saint-Émilion has several *appellations*, going up to *Premier Grand Cru*.

Nearly 5,000 hectares are given over to wine production and there are 800 châteaux, so you have plenty of choice. The vineyards can be explored by car, train, bike, horse, minibus or coach, and the tourist office has a list of châteaux offering tastings.

If you want to learn more, the Maison du Vin (tel: (Fr) 5 57 55 50 55, www.maisonduvinsaintemilion.com) runs introductory wine courses in French and English from mid-July to the start of September (11am-12.30pm, €25). At Château Fombrauge (tel: (Fr) 5 56 73 30 90, www.bernard-magrez.com), visitors can blend and label their own wine and learn how the estate runs. Some châteaux offer cookery courses, with some being under the tutelage of a sommelier who explains how to match the food to wine.

Saint-Émilion also holds a three-day jazz festival every July, with most concerts held in Parc Guadet (tel: (Fr) 5 57 55 50 56, www.saint-emilion-jazz-festival.com). Even here, wine is never far away. This year's programme included '*dégustations musicales*', which included a trio performing music to match each wine tasted.



(tel: (Fr) 5 57 24 42 13, www.lescordeliers.com). To buy a range of Saint-Émilion wines, visit La Grand Cave (tel: (Fr) 5 57 24 14 24, www.grande-cave-saint-emilion.com) in the square by the bell tower. The knowledgeable staff are happy to help.

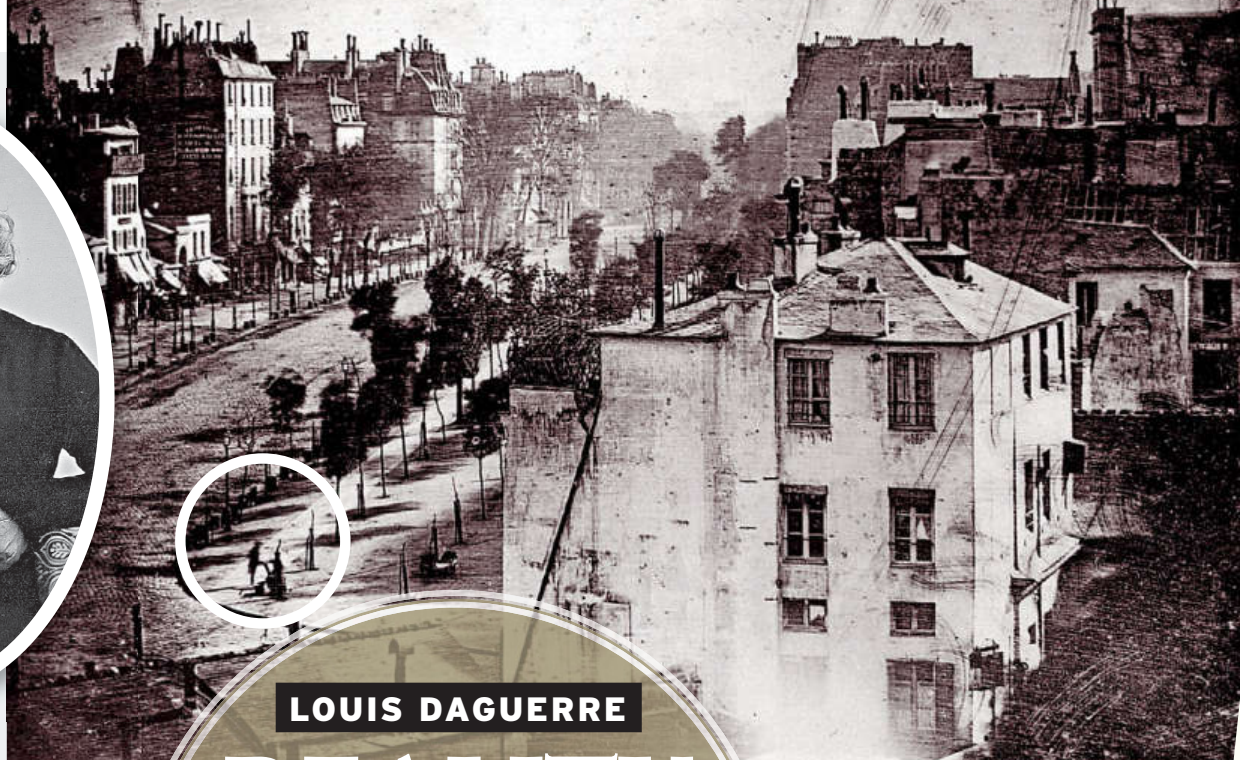
● The ruins of the Ursuline Convent are a reminder of Saint-Émilion's other speciality after wine - *macarons*, which were made by nuns who settled in the town in the early 1600s. After the French Revolution, the recipe of egg, sugar and almonds was supposedly traded for shelter and a meal. The closely guarded secret has passed down through a handful of families to Nadia Fermigier, who has a shop in Rue Guadet (*pictured below*, tel: (Fr) 5 57 24 72 33, www.macarons-saint-emilion.fr).



GETTING THERE: Bordeaux-Mérignac Airport, 53km from Saint-Émilion, is served by several UK airlines; The nearest railway station is Libourne (9km), a 3hr 20min direct journey from Paris Montparnasse; The village is an 8hr drive from the northern ferry ports.

TOURIST INFORMATION: Saint-Émilion tourist office, tel: (Fr) 5 57 55 28 28, www.saint-emilion-tourisme.com; Gironde tourist board, tel: (Fr) 5 56 52 61 40, www.visitbordeauxgironde.co.uk





LOUIS DAGUERRE

REALITY STAR

A master of illusion turned into one of the fathers of photography, says **Sheena Harvey**

Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre was born in Cormeilles-en-Parisis, just outside Paris, on 18 November, 1787. He is known as the father of photography, although strictly speaking he shares that honour with Nicéphore Niépce.

Both men were working in photochemistry and experimenting with the camera obscura to reproduce images when they were introduced by the optician who made lenses for their equipment.

Experimenting with photography was not Daguerre's primary occupation. He was a theatre backdrop artist and used the camera obscura to help him with perspective when painting landscapes. This technique also assisted him in the creations he called dioramas. These life-sized paintings on translucent screens were transformed from two to three dimensions by the use of light, shone either from behind or in front. Through this device the paintings mimicked movement, the passage of day into night and alterations in the weather.

Dioramas of country or classical scenes were exhibited in specially designed theatres to an audience sitting in the dark – a precursor of the cinema experience. The camera obscura was invaluable in helping Daguerre to paint accurate representations of the scenery, objects and buildings

A contemporary of Daguerre, the artist John Constable, went to a London

showing of the diorama in 1823 and wrote to a friend: "It is in part a transparency; the spectator is in a dark chamber, and it is very pleasing, and has great illusion. It is without the pale of art, because its object is deception. The art pleases by reminding, not deceiving."

When it came to the photographic process that produced what became known as a daguerreotype, Daguerre used a polished silver-coated copper plate that was treated to make it light-sensitive. It was then exposed in a camera obscura pointing at the subject for varying lengths of time, depending on the strength of the light, and then fumed with mercury vapour to make the image visible. After its light sensitivity had been neutralised with a saline solution, the plate was covered in glass to preserve the picture.

This process was begun in collaboration with Niépce, who had invented other photographic techniques, none of which developed the image with

the speed of the daguerreotype. When Niépce died suddenly of a stroke in 1833, Daguerre continued experimenting alone to perfect the technique. A rare daguerreotype that survives from this time is the *Boulevard du Temple* (pictured above), a Paris street scene that includes the first candid photograph of people: a man having his boots polished (*circled*). However, the ten-minute exposure time meant that the moving traffic was all but invisible.

Early in 1839, Daguerre's discovery was announced at a gathering of the Académie des Sciences in Paris. Rather than profiting directly from a patent, Daguerre assigned the rights to his invention to the French government in return for an annuity for life for himself and Niépce's son, Isidore, as well as the assurance that France would "nobly give the whole world this discovery which could contribute so much to the progress of art and science". François Arago, a renowned physicist and member of the Académie who had brought Daguerre to the institution's attention, publicised the daguerreotype process in August 1839 as a gift to the world from France.

After being awarded his pension, Daguerre retired with his wife Louise and adopted daughter Marguerite to Bry-sur-Marne in the eastern suburbs of Paris. He became a town councillor and designed and produced a magnificent diorama for the parish church opposite his house. He died on 10 July, 1851, aged 63. 📷

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY/JOAN-BAPTISTE SABATIER-BLOI; GETTY/UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE; GETTY/SCIENCE & SOCIETY PICTURE LIBRARY; MATHIEU LOWBARD/MUSEE ADRIEN MENTENNE; GETTY/FRANÇOIS DEMANGE/GAMMA-RAPHO

2



3



4



THINGS TO SEE

1 Maison Daguerre, Bry-sur-Marne, Île-de-France

After his death, Daguerre's family was made bankrupt and their house was taken over by an orphanage and then a children's epilepsy centre. The building was bought by the town council in 2010 with the aim of eventually creating a museum to display his work: paintings that were the basis of his dioramas and theatre set designs, and photographs, engravings and 30 daguerreotypes. Daguerre's works are currently on display in the town's Musée Adrien Mentienne, and private visits of Maison Daguerre are

available on request at the town's tourist office (tel: (Fr) 1 48 82 30 30). www.daguerre-bry.com

2 Daguerre tomb, Bry-sur-Marne

Daguerre was buried in the family plot in Bry's cemetery in Rue des Moines Saint-Martin but in 1853 the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts erected a monument on top. The *Illustrated News of New York* described it as being "of classic simplicity. A granite pedestal supports a pilaster, on the upper part of which Mr Husson has sculptured in medallion a likeness of the illustrious defunct." A ceremony and procession were preceded by a church service. www.bry94.fr

3 Saint Gervais-Saint Protais church, Bry-sur-Marne

The parish church in Grande Rue Charles de Gaulle contains the last diorama that Daguerre created, in 1842, and is the only one to have survived. It was recently restored with help from the Getty Foundation and French Ministry of Culture. The painting (pictured), on transparent canvas, measures just over five metres by six metres and shows a soaring Gothic church interior, which transforms the modest building into almost cathedral-like proportions. The clever lighting simulates daytime or night-time in the church, while the woodwork of the choir is painted as if in marble and increases the

illusion of the diorama as a continuation of the solid building.

Tel: (Fr) 1 49 83 99 39

4 Maison Nicéphore Niépce, Saint-Loup-de-Varennes, Burgundy

Daguerre stayed at the home of Nicéphore Niépce outside Chalon-sur-Saône four times, and the two men collaborated on early photographic techniques. It is where the first camera photograph, *Point de Vue du Gras*, was taken in 1826/27. The house is now a museum and includes pieces from the world's oldest photographic studio and laboratory. Open July and August; contact museum for other times. www.photo-museum.org



» » **A** « «
SUBTLE
Medley of
pretty things
and Good
Times
IN NORMANDY



www.bandedepart.fr / Photos : A. Guérin, JP. Gratien, Hôtel Ferme Saint-Siméon Honfleur / Illustration : F. Teillard



www.calvados-tourisme.com


Calvados
Un amour de Normandie

BON APPÉTIT

*The best of French gastronomy
at home and away*

Cheese for every season

Although many of us know which fruit and vegetables to eat in each season, far fewer are likely to have given much thought to the seasonality of their cheese selection. Brothers Alex and Léo Guarneri, who run the London branch of the artisan *fromagerie* Androuet, want to change that with their new cookbook *A Year in Cheese*.

With an introduction and recipes for all four seasons, the book reveals the best cheeses to eat at different times of year. In springtime, for example, when goats, sheep and cows are grazing in the fields, it's all about fresh, young varieties with abundant flavour such as the soft ewe's milk *Délice des Cabasses* or *Chabichou* goat's cheese.

In winter, go for bold mountain cheeses that have a strong, complex character after maturing over the summer; think pungent blues and creamy reblochon.

The fondue recipe (right) captures the warming pleasure that cheese can bring as the days get colder.

SERVES
2

ANDROUET FONDUE

- 180ml/6½fl oz dry white wine
- 2tbsp cornflour
- 340g/12oz 18-month-old Comté, grated
- 60g/2oz Emmental Grand Cru, grated
- Garlic clove, grated
- Black peppercorns

To serve

Selection of charcuterie
Cornichons
Crispy baguette, cut into cubes

1. Put the wine and cornflour in a pan over a medium heat. Whisk well until the mixture starts to thicken, then add the grated Comté and Emmental.
2. Stir over a low heat with a spatula until the cheese has melted and is bubbling.
3. Meanwhile, heat a cast-iron fondue dish. When it's hot, crush the garlic in it, then add the bubbling cheese.
3. Sprinkle with freshly cracked black pepper and serve immediately with the

charcuterie, cornichons and cubed baguette. (You can use other cheeses, but Alex and Léo suggest you discuss the most suitable ones with your cheesemonger).

A Year in Cheese by Alex and Léo Guarneri, with recipes by Alessandro Grano, is published by Frances Lincoln, priced £20. 





FEAST OF FUNGI

A three-Michelin-star chef leads a village's mushroom celebration

Every year on the weekend after Toussaint (1 November), the tiny village of Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid, poised high above the Rhône Valley on a plateau in the Haute-Loire *département*, gives itself over to a mushroom extravaganza.

The origins of the *Fête des Champignons* are lost in time. The village, surrounded by beech and pine forests, chestnut groves, pastures and mossy banks, has always been a forager's paradise. When the first frosts called a halt to mushroom-hunting, it was time to dry the season's pickings. A weekend in early November was earmarked for a mushroom market and foragers would bring their produce to Place des Champignons. In 1995 this relatively humble market took a leap forward when Régis Marcon (*pictured inset*), chef-patron of the village's three-Michelin-star Auberge des Cîmes, took it under his wing.

Thanks to the efforts of Marcon, his son Jacques and fellow village chefs Thierry Guyot and André Chatelard, the *fête* is now a fixture on the French foodie calendar. The village is closed to traffic and the main street lined with stands piled with dried fungi (*main picture*).

On my visit, purchases completed, I wrap my chilled hands round a steaming bowl of *soupe aux champignons*, a rich broth stiff with ceps and fragrant with home-made stock.



One marquee has a display of edible mushrooms: stout ceps with fat stumpy stems and burnished brown caps; egg-yolk yellow chanterelles, their upturned gills resembling Gothic fan vaulting; black and sinister horns of plenty; and the infinitely desirable morels, which look like tiny brown sponges.

In another marquee, the four chefs demonstrate dishes ranging from a traditional *velouté aux champignons* to more adventurous creations such as a veal chop clad in 'scales' of thinly sliced ceps. But the largest and liveliest tent is the one where visitors tuck into a gourmet mushroom menu, costing a modest €18.

Talking to our table neighbours, we discover that most come every year from as far as Brittany and Alsace. What distinguishes Saint-Bonnet's *fête* is that in spite of its reputation – and the participation of a star chef such as Marcon – it remains a simple country fair, dedicated to fine products, good food and plenty of fresh air.

Sue Style

• The 2015 *Fête des Champignons* will be held on 7-8 November (www.saintbonnetlefrroid.com)

How to...

BRINE AND CURE
BY TAM STORRAR, HEAD CHEF AT BLANCHETTE

There are many uses for salt within the kitchen that go beyond seasoning. Firstly, there is brining – not to be confused with curing – which is brilliant for fish.

A lot of fish travels a long way, packed in ice hovering just above freezing, so it takes on a slightly spongy texture. Twenty minutes in brine gives it an even seasoning and firms up the flesh.

To make a quick brine, throw a few dessertspoons of table salt (50g per litre) into cold water and a few ice cubes, and leave for about 20 minutes.

Curing is a process born in a time before fridges. The removal of water through salt inhibits the growth of microbes, but also changes the structure of the meat or fish with pleasant results, as you can see in gravadlax. It involves slathering the meat or fish in salt and sugar, and leaving for a few days (it would have been even longer before we had fridges!).

You can have a lot of fun with this basic concept. To cure salmon you can add calvados, purée of beetroot or blueberries, mustard, dill or horseradish – each one changes the flavour.

Switching from pink fish to white, try a cure of Pernod and saffron with halibut, brill or cod. At Blanchette, we cure duck legs in salt, sugar, herbs, orange and other aromatics for 24 hours before we confit them, which makes a huge difference.

Bon appétit!

Tam Storrar is head chef at Parisian-style bistro Blanchette in Soho, London.

Tel: 0207 439 8100

www.blanchettesoho.co.uk



Wine & food matching in... CHAVIGNOL

One of France's most famous goats' cheeses, the much-imitated Crottin de Chavignol, can be produced only in the area that surrounds the tiny eponymous village (*main picture*) in the eastern Loire Valley. The cheese gained its own *appellation d'origine* in 1976, although its production in Chavignol probably began as early as the 16th century.

A small cylindrical cheese, Crottin de Chavignol can be enjoyed at various stages of maturity. When young, it shows subtle, slightly nutty flavours; then after about six weeks, it begins to develop a more pungent taste, with a harder rind, earning the name Chavignol Bleuté. At full maturity it is known as Chavignol Bleu, when powerful and complex flavours take over, the dough becomes crumbly and the rind takes on a bluish-mould colour.

It is oft repeated that French regional cuisine is best served with local wine, and nowhere is this better illustrated than in Chavignol, a hamlet of fewer than 150 inhabitants. Chavignol's other vocation is winemaking; it was absorbed into the *commune* of Sancerre in the late 18th century and includes some of the latter's most famous vineyards, such as the



steeply sloping Les Monts Damnés and the emblematic wine estate Henri Bourgeois.

Sancerre's grapes are grown in the same soils that provide pasture for Chavignol's goats, giving fresh, zingy wines that perfectly match the cheese.

Young Crottin pairs with almost any Sancerre, but as the cheese ages, look for the more concentrated, mineral-laced wines from the slopes above Chavignol.

Sancerre is made from sauvignon blanc, and although the grape's pungent fruitiness can make it a fickle food partner, it is remarkably forgiving when paired with goat's cheese. So the sauvignons from the nearby vineyards of Pouilly-Fumé, Menetou-Salon, Reuilly, Quincy and Touraine all match well with a variety of goats' cheeses. Join the *Sancerrois* in spring by adding a few spears of asparagus, which are also great friends of sauvignon, to baked Crottin served on a bed of green salad.

Dominic Rippon



Need to gen up on your wine knowledge? Get your hands on the fourth edition of *The Oxford Companion to Wine* by Jancis Robinson and Julia Harding (£40, OUP), an enormous tome featuring almost 4,000 entries.

WINES OF THE MONTH BY SALLY EASTON, MASTER OF WINE

SNAP IT UP

Réserve du Boulas, Laudun 2014, Côtes du Rhône Villages

This round, medium-bodied white contains the classic southern Rhône varieties grenache blanc and roussanne, but nearly half of the blend comes from viognier. This variety, which is more usually found in the northern Rhône, adds floral perfume and depth. The result is fleshy, indulgent and rich, with ripe flavours of succulent peach from the viognier added to exotic tropical fruits.

Drink with: Creamy chicken pasta.

Marks and Spencer, £9

Tel: 0845 302 1234

www.marksandspencer.com



WEEKEND TREAT

Domaine des Terres Dorées, L'Ancien 2013, Beaujolais

Jean-Paul Brun's *domaine* is located in southern Beaujolais, which is renowned for the golden colour of its sedimentary stone (as opposed to the dark, granite north).

This wine is bright with purple hues and violet perfume. The palate attack is crunchy, with crisp, purple-skinned berries and the texture is smooth and fresh, with good concentration. It is juicy and succulent, with a sweetness of fruit along its length and a kick of black pepper to finish.

Drink with: Cottage pie.

Savage Selection, £11.80

Tel: 01451 860 896

www.savageselection.co.uk



TIME TO CELEBRATE

Domaine Albert Mann, Clos de la Faille Pinot Noir 2012, Alsace

Pinot noir reds from Alsace are a minority pleasure, but this shows how well it can work. The wine comes from a one-hectare, south-west-facing *monopole* at Wintzenheim, on a geological fault next to the Hengst *Grand Cru* vineyards. It is bright, translucent ruby and aromatic with subtle black cherry and black pepper fragrances. Warm and engaging on the palate, the wine has supple, silky tannins, sweet fruit and a rich, well-balanced concentration of flavour.

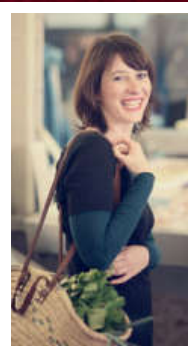
Drink with: Roast duck.

L'Art du Vin, £36.10

Tel: 01383 873 510

www.aduv.co.uk





Food critic and cookbook author Rosa Jackson lives in Nice, where she runs the cookery school Les Petits Farcis and writes about food for publications worldwide.

Make the perfect...

Salade lyonnaise

In the city of hearty appetites that is Lyon, rarely is a salad just a salad. This multi-purpose word might refer to a bowl of lentils cooked in goose fat, beetroot sautéed with onions and butter, or even an unlikely mixture of sheep's trotters, chicken livers, herrings and boiled egg.

My favourite of the local salads, though, is the one called *salade lyonnaise*: dandelion or frisée in a mustard vinaigrette topped with bacon, croutons and a poached egg. So ubiquitous has this dish become throughout France that it is often referred to simply as *frisée aux lardons*, discarding its origins.

Unfortunately, as its popularity spread, this salad also lost something of what made it unique. Inferior-quality lardons, pre-made croutons and bottled vinaigrette often turn this marvel of simplicity into a banal dish that the *mères lyonnaises*, founders of the city's famous *bouchon* restaurants, would have been horrified to see. For a *salade lyonnaise* to be worthy of the name, each element must be selected and treated with motherly care.

First, the leaves. The original version relied on dandelion greens, making it

Forget any pale imitations, this salad from France's gastronomic capital is full of punchy flavours, says
Rosa Jackson

a spring salad. These eventually became interchangeable with frisée, which meant that it could be served from autumn to spring. As the bitterness of the greens is important, escarole (an endive like frisée) works as a substitute, but lettuce turns it into something that is no longer *salade lyonnaise*. When using frisée or escarole, buy the whole head rather than the pre-washed greens so as to choose the leaves from the tender white heart.

You can easily buy pre-cut lardons (sliced bacon) in France, but for a more authentic version ask for a thick slice of *poitrine fumée* (smoked bacon) or *poitrine demi-sel* (salted bacon) at the butcher's and cut it yourself into thick

matchsticks. The meat is likely to be better quality and give off much less water than the supermarket lardons. You might also like to follow the example of French cooks and blanch the lardons for a minute in boiling water to remove some of the salt and fat.

The croutons should be rustic, so rather than making tidy cubes with square slices, rub day-old *pain de campagne* or sourdough with half a garlic clove and cut into rough chunks. Forget the olive oil and sauté them in butter, as the *Lyonnais* would.

For the vinaigrette, the essential elements are wine vinegar and plenty of mustard – no need for olive oil here either, try sunflower oil (preferably virgin) instead.

Finally, the eggs. The only tricky part of this salad is perfecting the technique of poaching them directly in simmering water. I find it helpful to break each egg into a sieve to let the thinnest part of the white run out before poaching in simmering water (see recipe below for full details).

It is easy to see why cafés take short cuts, but once you make an authentic *salade lyonnaise*, you will never accept anything less. 🍴

SALADE LYONNAISE

SERVES
4

For the salad

- 1 large frisée or 200g/8oz dandelion greens
- 1cm-thick slice of bacon, smoked or not depending on your preference
- 2 slices day-old *pain de campagne* or sourdough
- 1 garlic clove
- 30g/2tbsp butter
- 1tbsp white or cider vinegar
- 4 fresh free-range eggs

For the vinaigrette

- 2tbsp red or white wine vinegar

- 1tbsp Dijon mustard
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- 5tbsp vegetable oil

1. Wash the greens and dry them well. If choosing frisée, use mostly the tender white leaves from the centre.
2. Cut the bacon into matchsticks and dry-fry over a medium heat until golden. Drain on paper towels and set aside.
3. Slice the garlic clove in half and rub the bread with the cut side. Cut the bread into rough cubes and fry over a medium heat in the butter until golden.
4. Half-fill a medium saucepan with water and bring to a simmer. Add the vinegar.

- Break each egg into a sieve over a small bowl and leave for a few minutes. Transfer to a ramekin, then use a wooden spoon to create a whirlpool in the centre of the saucepan and transfer the egg to the whirlpool. Wait three minutes, then remove with a slotted spoon and place on paper towels to drain. Poach each egg one at a time the same way.
5. For the dressing, whisk together the vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper (remember the bacon will be salty). Slowly whisk in the oil until emulsified.
6. In a salad bowl, toss the greens with the dressing. Arrange on four plates, then top with the other elements. Serve right away.

1 LE BAR ANDRÉ

Venture inside this La Rochelle institution and you could forgive yourself for thinking that you're on a boat. Sapphire blue walls, wooden decking, lifebuoys, fishing nets and a ship's wheel all create a seafaring atmosphere in this delightful restaurant in the Charente-Maritime capital's *Vieux-Port*. Stretching across two streets, Le Bar André was opened in 1950 by Georges Bourdin, who continued to expand the restaurant before his son Jacques took the helm in 1981. Today the restaurant offers ample room for diners, but it is not just a place for eating and drinking; Le Bar André also stages temporary exhibitions, such as 'Land and Sea', a collection of images by La Rochelle photographer Cyril Jarno, which ran all summer.

With so many maritime influences, it is no surprise that the restaurant's speciality is seafood, all of which is locally sourced. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find anything else on the menu. If you want a real taste of the sea, the l'Andreyale platter is a must, overflowing with Île de Ré oysters, razor clams, prawns, whelks and shrimps. For a local treat try the mussels seasoned with Pineau des Charentes, a fortified wine which is often enjoyed as an aperitif. I chose another local favourite, a heartwarming dish of *chaudrée*, a stew containing many different types of fish that's perfect for a chilly autumn evening. A bottle of Domaine de la Chauvillière merlot, from the southern reaches of the Charente-Maritime *département*, made a great accompaniment, with its hints of raspberry and blackberry. Even dessert is a local affair; try the sweet apple tart topped off with caramel flavoured with *fleur de sel* from the Île de Ré, or the André Sundae made from fruit from villages near La Rochelle.

Service was ship-shape too and staff were happy to suggest alternative dishes for anyone with certain types of allergies. If you're after a special maritime atmosphere just a stone's throw from the sea then Le Bar André ticks all the boxes. Open daily, mains from €13.90.

Le Bar André, 5 Rue Saint Jean du Pérot, 17000 La Rochelle, tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 28 24, www.barandre.com



Eating out in... Charente-Maritime

On a trip to the Atlantic coast, **Peter Stewart** seeks out restaurants making full use of the bounty of the sea

2 LES FLOTS

The resort of Châtelailon-Plage lies 15 kilometres south of La Rochelle and is a popular summer playground for many wealthy Parisians. Here, overlooking the sandy beach and the Atlantic Ocean, stands Les Flots, a hotel and restaurant that illustrates the old saying about never judging a book by its cover. The exterior looks like many a seafront stone building, but once inside, you enter another world where a monochrome decor reigns, along with light oak parquet floors, designer chairs from Charles Eames and egg-white walls.

My friends and I stopped for Sunday lunch and within ten minutes of opening, the place was full of hungry locals, so a reservation is advisable. Dine here and you'll quickly appreciate the variety and richness of flavours packed into every dish, not to mention the attentiveness of the staff, who serve diners at lightning speed.

Being next to the ocean, this stylish place naturally offers a range of seafood dishes such as lobster pâté topped off with a creamy bisque, and an asparagus and smoked salmon flan marinated in a slow-cooked egg sauce. However, meat-eaters aren't ignored, with a large fillet of beef with fennel and sweet carrot glaze among the temptations. In the end, I chose the

PHOTOGRAPHS: FOTOLIA; RAOUIL DOBREMEL; HÔTEL CLARION COLLECTION

3 L'OCÉAN

Just a short hop across the bridge from La Rochelle lies the idyllic island of Île de Ré, with its white stone villages and ubiquitous wild hollyhock flowers. On the south coast you will find Le-Bois-Plage-en-Ré, which is home to L'Océan, a hotel and restaurant on the edge of the village.

Decked out in turquoise-tinged wood panels decorated with surfer art, scuffed burnt-cream chairs and tables, the restaurant creates a shabby-chic look which has a slightly Cape Cod feel about it. On venturing inside we received a warm welcome from the hotel and restaurant owner, Anne Latour, who doubles as maître d'. "Here at Océan we like to make all our guests feel important and enjoy a unique dining experience," she said with a twinkle in her eye.

With such a friendly reception it was no surprise to find the restaurant full to the brim with happy diners. The extensive menu features a wealth of often adventurous seafood dishes such as the foie gras maki (a form of sushi) with a celery and Granny Smith apple tartare. The rich flavours of the cannelloni with prawns and squid topped off with Provençal vegetables and a basil coulis were a hit with my dining companions, while I opted for the delicious grilled cod, served with a tart made from ground vegetables and a rocket pesto glaze.

The inventive combination of flavours even extended to the desserts; the *jonchée charentaise*, a local cheese made from either cow's or goat's milk, was topped off with a fennel jam and cognac dressing to create an explosion of sweet and savoury tastes on the palate.

The hotel's bedrooms are decorated in the same shabby-chic style as the restaurant (doubles from €85) and have views over the ocean.

Restaurant open daily, lunch menus from €19.50, dinner menus from €27.

Hôtel-Restaurant
L'Océan, 172 Rue de Saint-Martin, 17580 Le-Bois-Plage-en-Ré,
tel: (Fr) 5 46 09 23 07,
www.re-hotel-ocean.com ➔



The Vieux-Port of La Rochelle,
capital of Charente-Maritime



mackerel covered with a lemon-infused potato purée and completed the meal with a bottle of Sancerre d'Henri Bourgeois. Make sure you leave room for dessert, where options include a super-sweet nougat dish decorated with chocolate *macarons*, home-made profiteroles dripping in strawberry coulis and a *café gourmand*, consisting of five mini-puddings.

The dining experience was made even more pleasurable for being such great value, with sophisticated three-course menus starting from just €22. Looking over the water, I could imagine how wonderful it must be to come here for dinner and watch the sun melt away over the Atlantic. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

Les Flots, 52 Boulevard de la Mer,
17340 Châtaillon-Plage,
tel: (Fr) 5 46 56 23 42, www.les-flots.fr



FOOD TIP

Pineau des Charentes is a fortified wine made from grape juice and is available in white, with a honey-like flavour, and rosé, which is much fruitier. Legend has it that *pineau* was first created by accident in the 16th century when a vintner tipped his grape residue into a barrel of cognac and left it to ferment for some time.



APÉRO

La Voile Blanche

13 Quai du Gabut, 17000 La Rochelle
Tel: (Fr) 9 67 11 50 28

Located in the modern port area of the city, this restaurant-cum-bar is a great place to relax with a glass of wine. Get there early to find a table on the lovely terrace, which enjoys views towards the quaint old harbour.



Eating in

Explore the markets and shops of La Rochelle and beyond to stock up on the best sweet and savoury produce for your supper or picnic



PRESERVES

Confitures du Clocher

1 Chemin des Palissiat
17590 Ars-en-Ré

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 29 41 35

www.lesconfituresduclocher.com

This family-run shop on the Île de Ré, a couple of minutes' drive from Le Bois-Plage-en-Ré, specialises in jams ranging from raspberry and strawberry to salted caramel, honey and even onion. All jams are made from produce grown on the island and make the perfect accompaniment to your morning bread and crossaints.

CHEESE

Fromagerie La Nature Au Quotidien

Rue Thiers

17000 La Rochelle

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 44 96

www.fromagerie-cremerie-larochelle.fr

Housed inside the city's central market, this cheese shop stocks more than 350 varieties of French and international cheeses, including 45 types of goat's cheese. Everything is sourced from small producers, many of whom are in the Poitou-Charentes region.

MARKETS

Rue Thiers

17000 La Rochelle

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 14 68

The central market, open daily in the morning and until 7 pm on Fridays, has been operating here since 1835 and features more than 60 stalls, selling everything from meat and fish to wines and regional specialities.

and vegetables. A big attraction is the fishmonger's stall, which has a whole wall of seafood caught earlier that morning.

BREAD AND CAKES

Ô Rêve Gourmand

107 Boulevard de

la République

17340 Châtelailon-

Plage

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 56 64 12

This artisanal bakery in the centre of town stocks home-made breads, cakes and sandwiches and is very popular with locals. Specialities include *la galette charentaise*, a flat, round cake made from butter, flour and vanilla sugar.

Rue du Marché

17340 Châtelailon-

Plage

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 56 26 97

The town's covered market, housed inside an old art deco hall, is held from 8am-1pm and sells regional cheeses, meats, fruit

COFFEE BREAK

Ernest Le Glacier

15-16 Rue du Port, 17000 La Rochelle

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 50 55 60

www.ernest-le-glacier.com/

This coffee shop-cum-ice cream parlour in the Vieux-Port has been enchanting locals for years with its drinks and sweet treats. Ernest is particularly well-known for his range of ice creams, which you can pick up on the way out.



FROM TOP: The central market in Rue Thiers, La Rochelle; The stylish interior of La Voile Blanche; Jams line the walls of the Confitures du Clocher

NEXT
MONTH
EATING
OUT IN
COLMAR

PHOTOGRAPHS: FRANCIS GRAUDON

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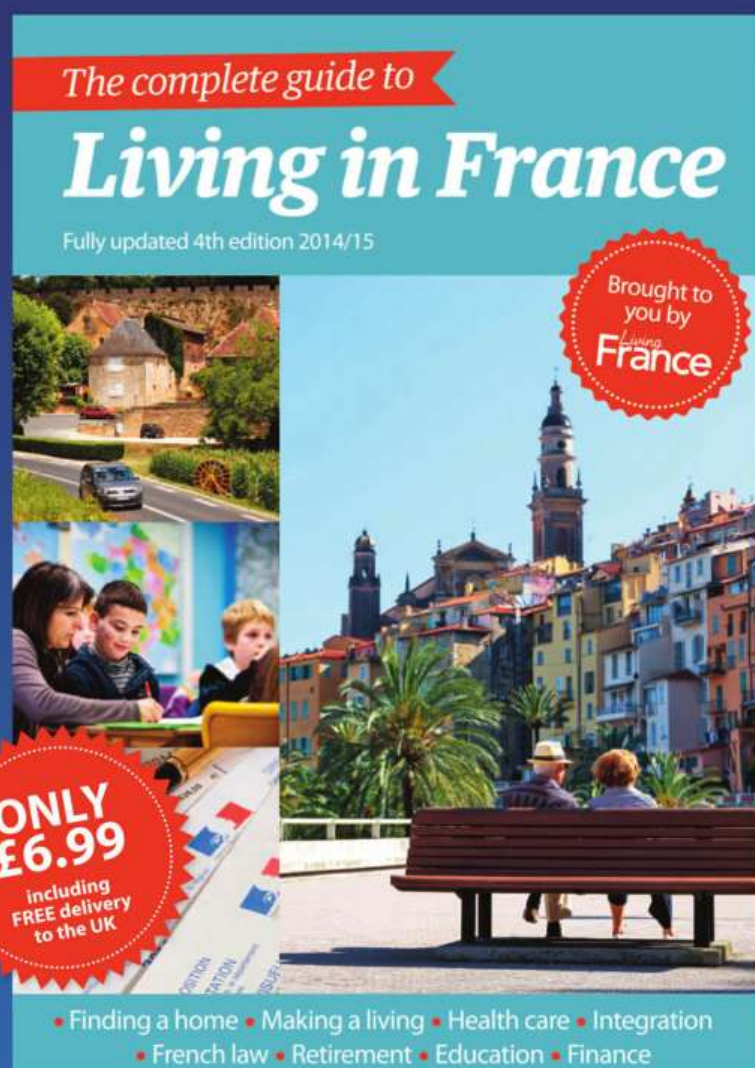


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Take home... French snails

In her regular column, **Clotilde Dusoulier** shows how to cook with the produce we buy in France

Although the idea of eating snails divides opinion – some say “Yuk!”, but I say “Yum!” – the molluscs have been part of the human diet since prehistoric times and they are, without doubt, one of France’s most iconic delicacies.

However, wild varieties have become so rare in the French countryside that we now have to resort to using imports from Eastern Europe, or snails farmed in France.

The problem with wild snails is that there is no controlling what they eat; as scavengers, snails will eat anything and retain all the toxins in their bodies, which you probably don’t want in yours!

The more desirable solution is, therefore, snail farming, or *heliciculture*. Out of the 35,000 tons of snails eaten each year in France, fewer than 4,000 tons are produced by French snail farmers, and this is the sort you want to seek out. Farmed snails are typically either the Petit-Gris (*Helix aspersa aspersa*) or, more often, its larger cousin the Gros-Gris (*Helix aspersa maxima*). When raised with care, their flavour is head and shoulders above what you may have tasted from imported snails.

On an artisanal snail farm, after the eggs hatch, the minuscule babies spend their first two weeks indoors before being placed in outdoor areas with



Clotilde Dusoulier lives in Paris and writes a popular food blog, *Chocolate & Zucchini*. She has published cookbooks and a guide to Paris restaurants and food shops.

wooden planks and varied greenery. Netting prevents them from seeking their fortune elsewhere and fends off predators. There they roam, eating the specially formulated plant-based feed and growing to 1,500 times their birth size within six months.

When ready for harvest, the snails are gathered tightly into netted bundles, which prompts them to purge their digestive system and go to sleep. They are put into hibernation in a cold room and then killed by being plunged briefly in boiling water. The flesh is then plucked out the shells, trimmed and blanched again to rid it of any remaining bacteria and to prepare it for cooking in a *court-bouillon* (flavoured stock).

There are snail farms in every region of France, so inquire about a local one on your travels (or check the directory at www.heliciculture.net). You will be able to purchase snails in various forms (fresh, jarred, as a spread) and possibly take a tour of the farm. [👉](#)

With thanks to Philippe Couvreur, owner of Les Escargots du Perche in Preaux-du-Perche, Orne (www.escargots-du-perche.com).

SNAIL AND BACON SKEWERS

- 24 cooked Gros-Gris snails from a jar (*escargots au court-bouillon*), drained
 - 6 thin slices (about 100g) streaky bacon
 - 1 small bunch flat-leaf parsley, leaves only
 - 2 garlic cloves
 - 1tbsp olive oil
 - Salt and pepper
1. Take six small wooden skewers, each about 12cm long, and string four snails on each one.
 2. Wrap a slice of

bacon around each skewer.

3. Place the skewers in an unoled skillet over a medium heat and cook for ten minutes, flipping them every few minutes so every side gets brown and crisp.

4. While the skewers are cooking, combine the parsley and garlic in the bowl of a food processor. Add the olive oil and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. Process until smooth.

5. Place the skewers on

a serving plate and dot with the *persillade*.

Serve warm with a pre-dinner drink, or over a salad of mixed greens and tiny steamed potatoes.

SERVES
8



Reviving Nouveau

From the midst of an identity crisis, the young Beaujolais red is making a comeback and taking everyone by surprise

As autumn takes hold and the vineyard leaves turn rich shades of gold and crimson, the fresh scent of fermenting grape must wafts through the villages of Beaujolais. At 12.01am on the third Thursday of November (the 19th in 2015), the new vintage of Beaujolais Nouveau will be released to the public. Winemakers race to ferment and bottle the year's harvest in time for the annual festivities, which centre on Beaujeu, the region's historic wine capital.

Beaujolais Nouveau is a *primeur* wine, released only weeks after the harvest, and is not to be confused with *en primeur* wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy, which are sold long before they are even bottled. Although the tradition for *primeur* wines began in ancient Greece, where the new vintage was offered as a blessing to the god Dionysus, and was brought to France by the Romans, it was in Beaujolais that the modern festival was born.

In the 1960s, canny *vigneron* Georges Duboeuf recognised Nouveau's potential to generate publicity; by the 1970s he had transformed the journey to Paris with the first bottles of Beaujolais into an annual celebration. Success followed elsewhere in Europe and then in the US, where the release of Nouveau coincides happily with Thanksgiving. Today it is



Dominic Rippon has many years' experience in the wine trade, both in the UK and France, and now runs the wine merchant business Strictly Wine.

Japan that keeps the flame alive, importing nearly half of all Beaujolais Nouveau.

But for all its apparent simplicity – as both a wine and a brand – Beaujolais Nouveau is a puzzle to many. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the wine was lambasted by critics across Europe and the US. They claimed – with much justification – that the brand had been used by complacent *vignerons* to unload inferior-quality juice; compounded by accusations of fraud and the unlawful addition of sugar to grape must. Others complained that Nouveau's brash, fruity flavour profile could be more cheaply replicated by winemakers in the New World. These criticisms rocked Beaujolais to its core, affecting not only Nouveau, but all of the region's wines, which have since struggled.

Green shoots

I have always loved the Beaujolais region.

The landscape is charmingly beautiful, with sleepy villages hiding between gently undulating hills and some of France's most interesting, if undervalued, vineyards. The promotional organisation Inter Beaujolais has spent years boosting the profile of the region's ten *Cru* villages, among which are Morgon, Fleurie, Moulin-à-Vent and Saint-Amour. These smaller AOPs (*appellations d'origine protégées*)



NOUVEAU PICK

La Maison P-U-R

'Production Unique Rebelle'

Beaujolais Nouveau

An organic, single-vineyard Nouveau, with ripe berry flavours that pair wonderfully with roast turkey (tel: (Fr) 9 65 03 13 33, www.vinpur.fr).

create fuller, more complete wines than those from the larger Beaujolais and Beaujolais Villages *appellations*; their distinct *terroirs* give wines of individual character – the best of which are toothsome country cousins of the finest reds from nearby Burgundy – and are almost always better value.

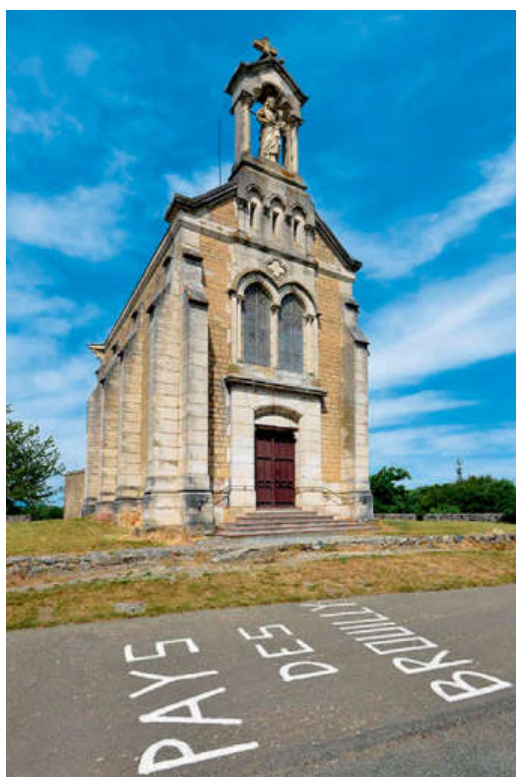
Yet despite Beaujolais's identity crisis and subsequent shift in focus, I recently stumbled upon a surprising set of figures from Inter Beaujolais. They suggested that only one category of Beaujolais has consistently grown in the UK market since 2011: Beaujolais Nouveau! In only four years, the volume of Nouveau exported to the UK has risen from 80,500 to nearly 400,000 litres, despite the difficult 2012 and 2013 vintages.

Inter Beaujolais admits that no one is really sure what has prompted this surge in popularity, although there is quiet optimism in the UK trade that a new generation of wine drinkers is either ignoring, or is simply unaware of, Nouveau's hitherto negative image. Restaurants and bars have rekindled their interest in Beaujolais Nouveau Day and there is even speculation that the fashion for the young red has come full circle, entering the realm of 'retro cool'.

Rustic flavours

Everyone loves a good festival, but Nouveau is a wine that is best not judged by the usual standards. Most red wines begin life as crushed grapes, the juice from which is fermented by yeasts that live on the skins (or are added by the winemaker) that turn sugar into alcohol with the help of oxygen. Beaujolais Nouveau, by contrast, undergoes an anaerobic fermentation devoid of oxygen. Whole bunches of gamay grapes are placed in sealed vats and a process called carbonic maceration begins: a mysterious intra-cellular fermentation within the grapes themselves that has no need for yeast. Eventually, as the grapes burst, the yeasts take over, but the by-products of this initial fermentation are soft tannins and the aromas of candied red fruit and pear drops for which Nouveau is renowned.

Unlike most red wines, which are praised for their staying power, Nouveau must be drunk young: its lack of exposure to oxygen during fermentation leaves it vulnerable to spoilage – as anyone who has left a bottle of Nouveau open overnight will testify. So it's a wine made to be quaffed within weeks or months of the harvest. And if good wine must be well mannered, Nouveau presents another challenge: its rasping, rustic flavours are of a wine in a brief, exuberant flush of youth, as impatient to show its character as its fans are to drink the first bottles.



TOP: Vineyards around the château in the village of Jarnioux; **ABOVE:** Celebrating Beaujolais Nouveau; **LEFT:** The Chapelle Notre-Dame des Raisins looks over vineyards from the top of Mont Brouilly; **FACING PAGE:** Beaujolais vineyards glow in the autumn sun

Beaujolais Nouveau, then, is a wine for those who are excited by the first taste of what the vineyards have yielded only weeks earlier: a wine of celebration rather than reflection. If you decide to join the festivities in Beaujolais this month, remember that Nouveau is best served slightly chilled and approached without dwelling too much on the past. 🍷



GETTING THERE: Beaujeu is 6hr 30min from the northern ferry ports; The train from Paris Gare de Lyon to Mâcon-Loché TGV takes 1hr 35min; The nearest airport is Lyon-Saint-Exupéry; **TOURIST INFORMATION:** Villefranche Beaujolais tourist office, tel: (Fr) 4 74 07 27 40, www.villefranche-beaujolais.fr; **WINES:** Inter Beaujolais, www.beaujolais.com

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LA CULTURE

Your essential guide to French culture and language

France on film

French cinema greats from the silent era to the present feature in a UK-wide festival, says **Zoë McIntyre**

Take your seats for a feast of Francophone cinema that has been lined up for the 23rd French Film Festival UK, which opens this month.

A mixture of classics and new releases will be screened in more than ten British cities and towns from 5 November to 9 December. Highlights include Abel Gance's silent film *J'accuse*, an anti-war epic from 1919, which will be shown at the Barbican Centre in London complete with a live piano accompaniment to enhance the drama.

The 120th anniversary of Gaumont, the world's oldest film company, will be celebrated with screenings of three of the studio's most famous films: director Luc Besson's 1988 cult classic *Le Grand Bleu* (*The Big Blue*) starring Jean Reno as a champion free-diver; Jean-Pierre

Melville's 1949 drama *Le Silence de la Mer* (*The Silence of the Sea*), based on the wartime story by Vercors; and Paris-set detective drama *L'Assassin Habite au 21* (*The Murderer Lives at Number 21*), the 1942 screen debut of thriller director Henri-Georges Clouzot.

Among the new releases are *Mon Roi* (*My King*) with Vincent Cassel and the period thriller *Les Anarchistes*, as well as French-language films from Québec, Belgium and Switzerland.

Guest speakers include director Jérôme Bonnell, who will present his new film *À Trois On y Vas* (*All About Them*) in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Leeds.

Festival director and co-founder Richard Mowe said: "The festival has expanded its horizons this year to ensure that audiences around the UK can see many of the French films which otherwise would not make it to these shores. *Que la fête commence!*"

For more details and a programme, visit www.frenchfilmfestival.org.uk

MAIN PICTURE: World War I action from the 1919 film *J'accuse*; **INSET LEFT:** Classic police thriller *L'Assassin Habite au 21*; **INSET RIGHT:** The new release *Les Anarchistes*, set in late-19th-century Paris; **LEFT:** A scene from *À Trois On y Vas*, which will be introduced by its director Jérôme Bonnell at four festival screenings



CINEMA RELEASE

Le Tableau

Starring: (voices of) Jessica Monceau, Adrien Larmande, Chloé Berthier

Director: Jean-François Laguionie

Certificate: TBC

Running time: 79 minutes

Release date: Until 24 October at the Ciné Lumière, London



Now receiving a welcome cinematic re-release, *Le Tableau* is the sort of film that really comes into its own on the big screen. Featuring beguiling, eye-popping animation, Jean-François Laguionie's parable transports you to a world where figures in an incomplete painting are not only alive; they have set up a hierarchy. Ruling the roost are the fully-formed Alldunns, followed by the semi-completed Halfies and the poor Sketchies, charcoal outlines who are shunned. Everyone is waiting for the god-like 'painter' to return and finish his creation, although the privileged Alldunns are quite happy for that particular prophecy to remain unfulfilled. When Halfie Claire (Berthier) runs away, her lover, an Alldunn named Ramo (Larmande), joins forces with her best friend Lola (Monceau) to track down their creator and set things right.

Like all accomplished animated features *Le Tableau*, originally released in 2011, works on more than one level. Children will automatically root for the cute underdogs and enjoy the characters escaping the confines of their painting, tumbling into an artist's studio. For adults there are hefty themes such as religion, class wars and slavery to contemplate, much of which are treated in none-too-subtle ways.

The heavy-handed narrative is balanced out, though, by some wonderful visual touches. The way our intrepid heroes travel from painting to painting is a delight, while a creative twist sees the painter putting in an appearance through a self-portrait. It's a spectacle that deserves the biggest canvas possible, making this limited re-release a real treat.

Pierre de Villiers

OTHER NEW RELEASES

CINEMA

Asterix and Obelix: Mansion of the Gods (from 23 October)

- In the latest animated adventure based on René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's comic strips, the two indomitable Gauls

fight Julius Caesar's plans for a huge Roman development next to their village.

Steve McQueen: The Man and Le Mans (from 20 November)

- Documentary showing the 1960s movie star's obsessive attempts to make a film of the 24-hour endurance race.

Five minutes with... JULIA STAGG

The British author talks about the inspiration behind her new book *Last Chance in the Pyrénées* (see review, right) and the French people's love affair with food.

This is the fifth and final book in my series about the village of Fogas in the Ariège département where my husband and I had an auberge. Running the business allowed us to develop a knowledge of bureaucratic red tape and I used this, together with the village's spectacular setting high up in the Pyrénées, to construct my story.

I had lived all over the world teaching English as a foreign language, and my husband and I felt that moving away to France and starting a small business would be an excellent way for me to focus more on my writing. It was a step into the unknown but it was worth it.

I found myself paying great attention to the people, the scenery and the atmosphere around me to sculpt my book, and within minutes of sitting down one day at the kitchen table I had a rough outline for a series of five books about life in a mountain village. Looking back, all the books have parts that have completely moved me, with the latest one being the most poignant, as it is the last in the series.

What struck me most



during my time there was the relationship that French people have with food. Whenever I ate outside, passers-by would always wish me *bon appétit*! Similarly, I would be offered slices of *saucisson* or local cheese whenever I passed people having a picnic.

I am still in love in France, and although I don't know what the future holds, I wouldn't rule out moving back there.

Julia Stagg was talking to Peter Stewart

We are listening to...

Si Jamais J'oublie by singer-songwriter Zaz. The lyrics (on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)) deal with the importance of knowing who you are.

DVD

Penny Dreadful (from 26 October) - French actress Eva Green is devilishly good in the second season of the TV horror series, which transforms literature's scariest characters.



BOOKS

Last Chance in the Pyrénées

Julia Stagg, Hodder Paperbacks, £7.99

In the fifth and concluding part of the Fogas Chronicles, tragedy strikes in the Pyrenean village and residents are once again forced to protect their way of life. Political ambitions at the town hall reach an all-time high, while previously friendly relationships are tested to their limits and a plot for revenge has devastating consequences. It is not all doom and gloom as fresh love interests and new beginnings emerge, with villagers realising that community and friendship are two of the most important things in life. Stagg once again draws on her personal experience of living in the Pyrénées in what is a fitting conclusion to her popular novel sequence. ★★★★★



Rodin

Raphaël Masson & Véronique Mattiussi, Flammarion, £19.95

The world's most famous sculptor, Auguste Rodin, caused huge controversy during his life, defying artistic convention with expressive works featuring the human body, including *The Kiss* and *The Thinker*.

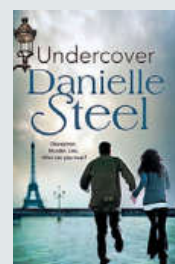
This monograph, produced by experts at the Musée Rodin in Paris, traces the artist's long career, from his apprenticeship through to his last years, which were overshadowed by illness and war. The authors also examine Rodin's tumultuous relationship with the sculptress Camille Claudel. Featuring around 300 illustrations in colour and black and white, as well as specially commissioned photographs of his sculptures, the book provides an insight into the mind of a creative genius. ★★★★★



Undercover

Danielle Steel, Bantam Press, £18.99

The world's best-selling living author has a home in Paris, which is the setting for her latest novel. The hero is Marshall Everett, a former undercover agent who seeks a new, tranquil life in the City of Light after being badly hurt in an assignment that went wrong. He crosses paths with Ariana, the daughter of an American ambassador, who has sought shelter in Paris after her life is threatened. But the dangers the pair have faced are not over yet and they must work together in the French capital to flee the problems of their past. Packed full of twists and turns, the story is sure to keep readers on their toes. ★★★★★



BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Peter Stewart's round-up of accessible language resources focuses on audio-visual learning

When it comes to studying languages, many people either read textbooks or listen to CDs. However, I believe that you can do both; audio-visual learning is an effective alternative to traditional methods as it enables you to read and listen to the language simultaneously.

One excellent example is the BBC *Ma France* online course (www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french). It features 24 interactive units, each of which has three short videos that introduce new **vocabulary and grammar structures**. The course, delivered by a native French speaker, is tailored to help learners in different practical situations, from ordering food and drink to buying a house.

Another great resource is the TV5Monde site (www.apprendre.tv5monde.com). Learners will be spoilt for choice with the range of **videos** available to download and watch, each one linked to a specific topic and accompanied by comprehension exercises.

If you want to encourage your little ones to take their first steps in French, look out for *Listen and Learn First French Words* (Usborne Publishing, £9.99). It looks like a book from the outside, but is in fact a sound panel that allows **young learners** to listen to 128 French words printed on four cards all spoken by a native speaker.

Primary school teachers seeking new ways to encourage pupils to learn French should

consult *Games for Teaching Primary French* (Crown House Publishing, £18.99).

This practical toolkit, being published on 29 October, is packed full of activities for beginners and more able learners, from quick-fire games to longer exercises. The content covers all aspects of the Primary French curriculum.

Any learners looking to focus their efforts on correct **pronunciation** will appreciate *Pronounce it Perfectly in French* (Barron's Educational Series, £15.99). This three-CD and book programme places the emphasis on learning the intonation patterns and vowel and nasal sounds of native speakers. It comes with a phonetic guide to pronunciation and plenty of exercises too.

For a little light relief, sit back and relax with the **film** OSS 117: *Le Caire, Nid d'Espions*. This James Bond spoof stars Jean Dujardin (in his pre-*Artist* days) and will have you learning and laughing at the same time with its fast-paced dialogue and hilarious stunts.



THIS MONTH'S BEST PICKS

BEGINNERS

Living French: 8th edition, John Murray Learning, £15.99

This easy-to-follow guide covers everyday topics with material organised so that readers build on what they have learnt. Each section has grammar explanations, vocabulary lists and reading comprehension exercises, while the accompanying CD features pronunciation and listening exercises.



INTERMEDIATE

Grammaire Progressive du Français, CLE International, £17.95

This detailed guide, all in French, is divided into 52 chapters which introduce grammar concepts that increase in difficulty as you go along. Lessons and exercises are set on facing pages to help your studies, and there is an enclosed audio CD and online workbook.



ADVANCED

Hygiène de l'Assassin by Amélie Nothomb, Librairie Générale Française, £7.65

The Belgian author's novella is written almost completely in dialogue and tells of a group of journalists who take it in turns to interview a terminally ill novelist with a mysterious past.

The quick-fire dialogue and plot twists will keep you guessing until the very end.



Do say,
DON'T SAY:

In work situations, never describe a trainee as a '*trainée*' - the correct word is '*stagiaire*'. '*Trainée*' is a very strong slang word that is equivalent to slag or slut.

GRAMMAR CORNER

LIAISONS

A liaison is when a consonant that is usually silent at the end of a word is pronounced because the following word begins with a vowel or silent h.

It is compulsory when you have the determiner + noun, for example, '*des amis*' and '*tout homme*', and between the subject or object pronoun and the verb, '*ils aiment*' and '*allez-y*'. The liaison is also used between '*est*' and the following word in impersonal expressions, such as '*il est évident qu'il viendra*'.

Furthermore, the liaison is used between many monosyllabic prepositions and the next word, '*dans une heure*', and with compound words such as '*un pot-au-feu*'.

The liaison is not required after the conjunction '*et*' in '*un fils et une fille*' and the final consonant in a singular noun, '*un temps idéal*'. Another exception is after the '-es' second person singular ending of the present tense and present subjunctive, '*tu portes un t-shirt vert*', '*il faut que tu lui écrives un poème*'.

VAN GOGH'S IRIDESCIENT IRISES

A painting left unsold at the artist's death fetched a record price at auction nearly a century later, as **Régine Godfrey** explains

Lors d'une vente aux enchères à New York le 11 Novembre 1987 une assemblée de 2,000 collectionneurs, antiquaires et conservateurs reste ébahie quand les enchères pour *Iris* par Vincent van Gogh atteignent les \$53.9 millions – le prix record d'une oeuvre d'art.

Iris est peint en 1889 peu après que Van Gogh entre de son propre chef à l'asile de Saint-Paul-de-Mausole à Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, suite à des débordements émotifs qui l'ont conduit à se couper un morceau d'oreille.

Il a déjà exécuté *Le champ de blé aux iris près d'Arles* l'année précédente et utilisera le thème de l'iris trois autres fois, présentant les fleurs deux fois dans des vases. Vincent se sent positif et plante son chevalet dans un coin du jardin non entretenu. Il écrit: "Certains patients sont sérieusement malades... ils viennent tous regarder... ils font preuve de discrétion et de bonnes manières pour ne pas m'embêter, contrairement aux gens d'Arles."

Son admiration pour les motifs des estampes japonaises ukiyo-e l'influence à créer une scène haute en couleurs, asymétrique, en gros plan; des iris bleu vif rehaussés de contours noirs se balancent sur leurs tiges vert marin, les feuilles en forme d'épées. À gauche, un parterre de soucis remplit le reste de la toile, éclipsé par un unique iris blanc qui domine le sol couleur terre cuite.

Vincent envoie le tableau de 71 par 93 centimètres à Paris, où son frère Théo le présente au 'Salon des Indépendants'. Malgré les éloges chaleureux de l'artiste Claude Monet et du critique d'art Octave Mirbeau, l'oeuvre sera invendue.

Van Gogh meurt l'année suivante, âgé de 37 ans. *Iris* reste en France jusqu'en 1947 quand Joan Whitney Payson, propriétaire de l'équipe de baseball les New York Mets et héritière d'une collection allant de Rembrandt à Sargent, l'acquiert. Son fils John devient le gardien d'*Iris* pendant 12 ans. Suite au résultat faramineux de la vente à Sotheby il fait don de sommes généreuses à des organisations du Maine, l'état où son père était né. L'acquéreur anonyme se révèle être l'homme d'affaires Australien Alan Bond, qui en raison de difficultés financières, vendra le chef d'oeuvre au Musée Getty en Californie en 1990.

At an auction in New York on 11 November 1987, a gathering of 2,000 collectors, dealers and museum curators was left flabbergasted as the bidding for *Irises* by Vincent van Gogh reached \$53.9 million – breaking the record for a work of art.

Irises was painted in 1889 soon after Van Gogh admitted himself to the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, following emotional outbursts that led him to cut off part of his ear.

He had already produced *Field with Irises near Arles* the year before and used the iris theme another three times, twice displaying the flowers in vases. Van Gogh felt positive and positioned his easel in a corner of the untended garden. He wrote: "Some patients are seriously ill...they all come to look... they have the discretion and good manners not to bother me... unlike the people of Arles."

His admiration for the Japanese patterning of ukiyo-e woodblock prints led him to design a boldly coloured, asymmetrical, close-up scene; bright blue irises enhanced by black contours

sway on their sea-green stems, the leaves shaped like swords.

On the left, a bed of marigolds fills the rest of the canvas, outshone by a single white iris which dominates the terracotta-tinted soil.

Vincent sent the 28in-by-36in oil painting to Paris, where his brother Théo submitted the work at the 'Salon des Indépendants'. Despite being warmly praised by the artist Claude Monet and art critic Octave Mirbeau, the piece was unsold.

Van Gogh died the following year, aged 37. *Irises* stayed in France until 1947 when Joan Whitney Payson, owner of the New York Mets baseball team and heiress to a collection that ranged from Rembrandt to Sargent, acquired the painting. Her son John later became the guardian of *Irises* for 12 years. After the staggering result at the Sotheby's sale he donated generous sums to organisations in Maine, the state where his father was born. The anonymous purchaser turned out to be Australian entrepreneur Alan Bond, who, due to financial difficulties, sold the masterpiece to the Getty Museum in California in 1990. 🌸



Word on the street:

The common meaning of '**thon**' is tuna fish, but the word is also an insulting way of describing someone as ugly.



IDIOMS



Guess the meaning of the idiom
'chercher la petite bête'.

- a) To go on a wild goose chase
- b) To look for a needle in a haystack
- c) To split hairs

QUI SUIS-JE?

Lisez les indices ci-dessous
et devinez qui je suis

Je suis né le 22 août 1908
à Chanteloup-en-Brie en
région Île de France.

De nombreux gens me
considèrent comme une
figure emblématique de
la photographie du
20ème siècle.

En 1947 j'étais cofondateur
de la célèbre agence
cooperative Magnum Photos.

Je suis...

5 WAYS
TO SAY...

I'm
confused

Je suis perplexe

This is the standard
way to say that
you're confused.

Je suis
désorienté

This phrase means
that you're bewildered
by something.

Je suis paumé

This colloquial phrase
means that you're
at a loss.

Je suis dans
le brouillard

This colloquial phrase
means that you're
in the dark about
something.

Je suis largué

This colloquial phrase
means that you're
all at sea.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Match these types of food
preparation with their
English equivalents

En papillote

Browned
breadcrumbs

Paysanne

Cooked in parchment

Portefeuille

Lightly flavoured
stock to poach fish

Chiffonade

Vegetables cut
into thin slices

Court-bouillon

Stuffed, folded or
placed in layers

Chapelux

Green vegetables cut
into fine ribbons

Manteau [Mon-toe] Coat



Find the French words for garden insects

- 1 Nelfor
- 2 Conelicele
- 3 Linopapl
- 4 Bleliulel
- 5 Tleaseleur
- 6 Réasbeac

Answers

Pyramione - vegetables cut into thin slices.
 Portofurible - stuffed, folded or placed in layers.
 cifronifedane - green vegetables cut into fine ribbons.
 noust-bhoibion - brightly flavoured stock to poach fish in.
 chupapile - browned breadcrumbs.
 oust-fuf-ferm Cartier-Bresson. **Adnagrans:**
 froion - horneet cocoon.
 fadpajion - butterfly, libellule.
 gadregny - scabrous.
 gadregny-twister - beetle.
 gadregny-twister - Tempas passu, menu cruxu, lit rat frys.
 As rat vlt rat semitlic, can cruxu, lit rat frys. As in which a rat settled, a cat saw it, the rat fled, the cat followed it, the rat was caught.

	P		B		P		A		A	
R	A	T	A	T	O	U	I	L	L	E
	T	A	S	S	E		G	A	I	N
D	I	C	T	A	T	E	U	R		C
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R	E	P	E	R	T	O	I	R	E	S
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The winner of the September Mots Fléchés quiz is Judith Clayton, from Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. The mystery town was Tende in Alpes-Maritimes.

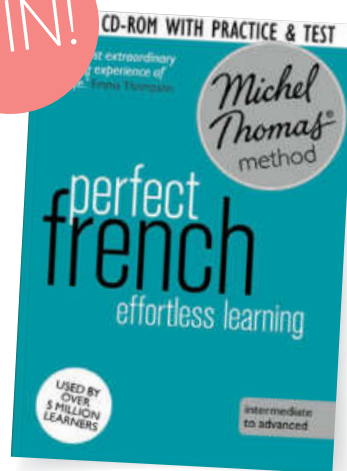
COMPETITION

Les Mots Fléchés

The winner of this month's competition will receive the *Michel Thomas Perfect French* CD-audio course, published by Hodder & Stoughton. It will help intermediates take their French to the next level and gain confidence

without books, writing or striving to memorise everything. The pack, which retails at £100, contains ten hours of audio learning on CD, more than three hours of extra vocabulary help, a visual learning review and interactive exercises.

WIN!



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			OUVRENT LES PORTES LOGO	C	L
SUR LE TRONC DE L'ARBRE FICELLE				ENLEVA BIÈRE BLONDE	E
			TRÉSOR		
CALME DANSE EN ARGENTINE					DÉPARTEMENT N°11
			LAC EN SUISSE MUSIQUE DU MAGHREB		
HUILEUX	MARCHE SANS BUT PÉRIODE		R	OBTENU CONJONCTION	EN MATIÈRE DE
		SANCTION FINANCIÈRE	A		
DANS		PETITS MORCEAUX	I		

To enter: Complete Les Mots Fléchés grid and note all the letters in the grey squares. Rearrange these letters to spell a French town or city and send this answer, together with your name, telephone number and address, to: *FRANCE Magazine*, Les Mots Fléchés, Cumberland House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1BB. Entries close 4 November 2015.

Last month's Les Mots Fléchés answers will be posted on our website www.francemag.com/quiz and appear in the December issue, on sale on 4 November 2015. The answers to this month's competition will be on the website from 11 November 2015, and in the January 2016 issue, on sale on 2 December 2015.

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Slice up the baguette where the spaces should be

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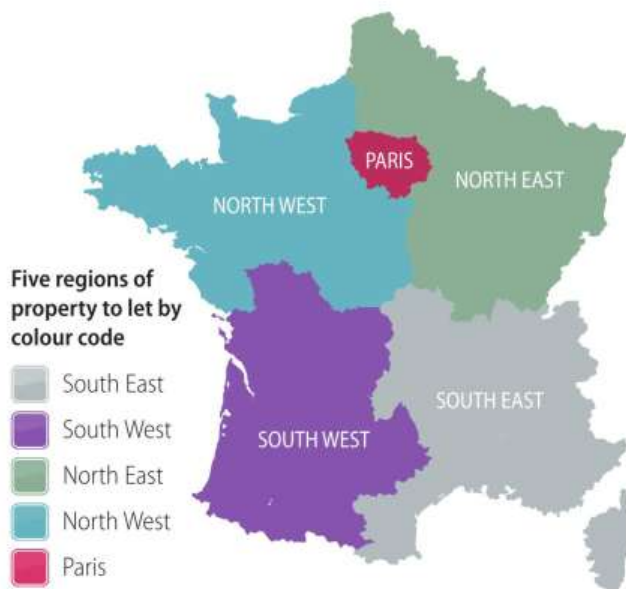
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HOLIDAY PROPERTY TO LET

How to get the most from our extensive rental section

Simply choose the region you are interested in and browse through the selection of properties. Our simple key will tell you all you need to know about the rental property of your choice. Though many will be listed with French telephone numbers, most will be answered by English speakers, unless otherwise stated.



KEY

- 1 Full colour picture
- 2 Département number
- 3 Nearest town
- 4 Département name
- 5 Sleeping capacity
- 6 Property description
- 7 Weekly rental range (in £ or €)
- 8 Contact details

Numbers 9-16 are distances in km, Q/S for On-site and N/P for details Not Provided.

- 9 Nearest supermarket
- 10 Nearest airport
- 11 Nearest beach/swimming
- 12 Nearest tennis
- 13 Nearest golf
- 14 Nearest horseriding
- 15 Nearest restaurant
- 16 Nearest tourist attraction

COLLIOURE, PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES

CAPACITY: 2-4

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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH EAST

FEATURED
RENTAL

06



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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH EAST

FEATURED
RENTAL

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CAPACITY: 4

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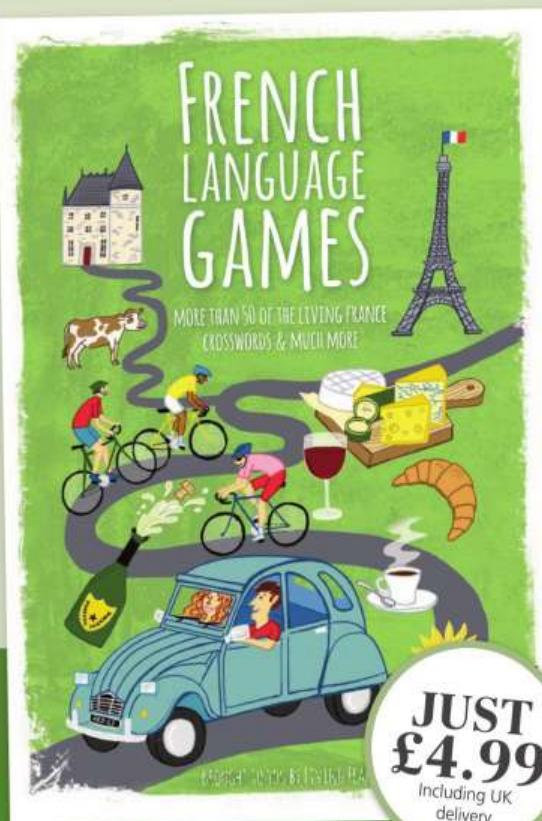
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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH WEST



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■ CAPACITY: 2-22

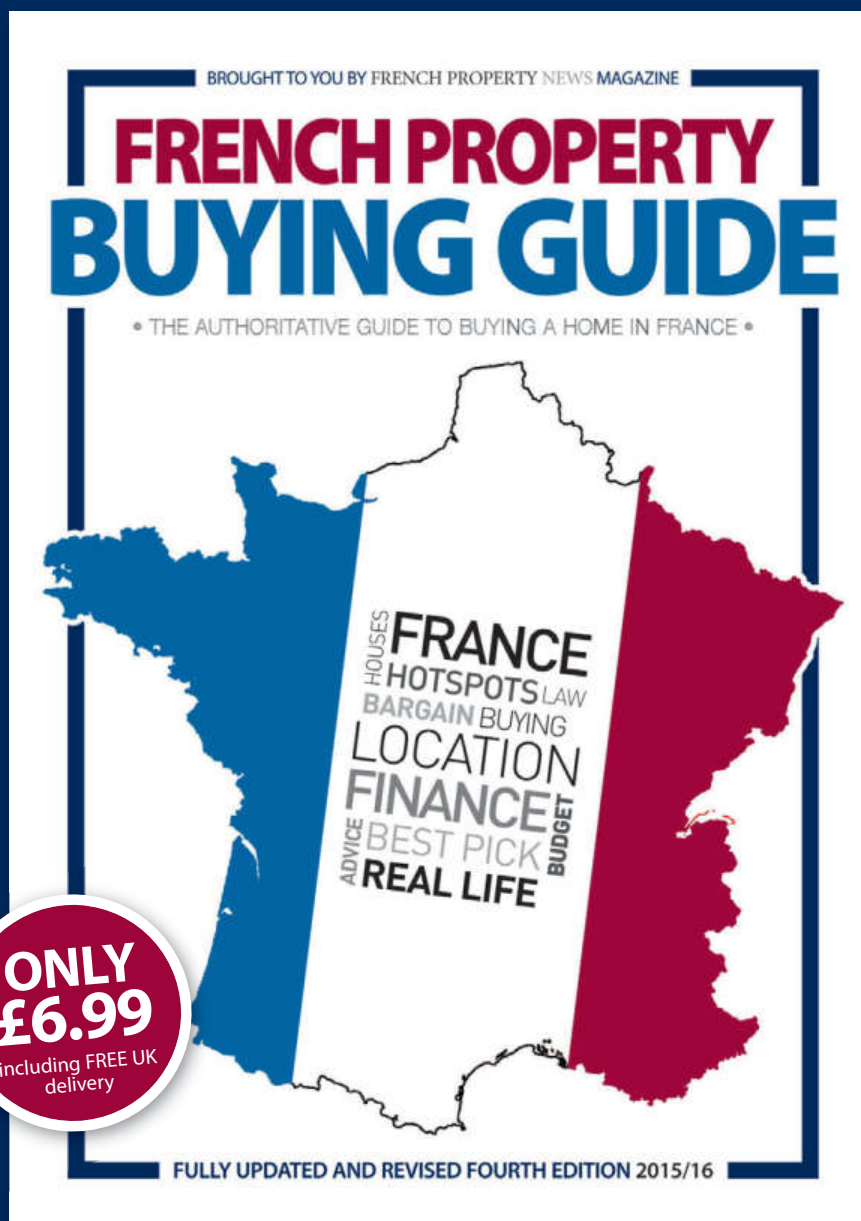
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INTERVIEW

You began recording songs in French in the 1950s.

How did that come about?

I had had a couple of hit records in Britain and suddenly started getting phone calls from people in Paris asking me to go over and sing to a French audience. I was asked a number of times to perform at the Olympia Theatre and to appear on Europe n°1 – the hit radio station at the time. I turned down the opportunity a few times as I didn't speak a word of French back then, but they eventually twisted my arm.

What was it like to sing in French?

It was daunting at first; my sister had attended the Lycée Français in London and helped me to compose songs. I produced songs using phonetics as I struggled with reading French at the time because of all the accents. I eventually picked up the language as I found myself living in Paris, where my musicians were all French and spoke only a few words of English.

How's your French now?

I would say that it is very good, which is largely thanks to having a French husband [the publicist Claude Wolff] who didn't speak much English at that time. I was in love and felt compelled to learn French.

What was it like to live in Paris?

I had visited the city as a tourist and thought it was a beautiful place. However, I didn't understand French and it was all very foreign to me. When I moved to Paris I found it to be very French; the women were *très chic*



My France Petula Clark

The evergreen singer and actress tells **Peter Stewart** about her early career in Paris and her favourite places in l'Hexagone

and beautiful, and it made me feel rather mousy. The way of life was completely different to anything that I had experienced, which was both exciting and scary. I ended up living in the city for seven years.

You now live in Geneva. Do you visit France fairly often?

Yes. We have a chalet in Megève (pictured) which is about an hour's drive. I had the most wonderful years touring around France, and whenever I cross over the

border I am reminded how amazingly varied and beautiful a country it is.

Why did you choose to have a home in Megève?

Megève was somewhere that everyone from Paris would flock to way back when for the *vacances de neige*. It was and still is such a fun place and we loved the atmosphere. It became our second home and now we spend Christmas there with all the family.


Is there a particular part of France which is close to your heart?

Early in our marriage, my husband and I bought a place in the south of France, so that is an area that I have loved over the years. I also love Brittany, in particular Dinard where I holidayed when I was fairly young. I enjoy its family-friendly vibe and its popularity with British visitors. Sarlat in the Dordogne is another favourite of mine; they make the most delicious prunes!

After so many years as a singing star, what was it like to present BBC TV's documentary *Je t'aime: The Story of French Song*?

It was a very nice experience. *La chanson française* is a bit of a cliché and I wanted to change people's ideas about it. The programme enabled me to research some amazing French artists who are virtually unknown in Britain and to roam around Paris, which was fantastic.

So what's next for you?

I'm currently working on a new CD in English. The album will feature a French song: a rather unusual one, entitled *La Vérité, c'est vous* (*The Truth is You*). 



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